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J I L L

BY

E. A. DILLWYN

IN TWO VOLUMES. — VOL. I.

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CHAPTER I.

JILL INTRODUCES HERSELF.

I HAVE heard people say that men are more apt to be of an adventurous disposition than women ; but that is an opinion from which I differ. I suppose it has arisen because timidity and sensitiveness are hostile to the spirit of enterprise, checking its growth and development, and not unfrequently proving altogether fatal to it ; and as these qualities are especially characteristic of the weaker sex, it follows naturally that noted female adventurers are less common than male ones. But that seems only to show that an unfavourable soil has caused the plant to become blighted or smothered, and is no conclusive proof that the seed was never sown. It is my belief that the aforesaid spirit is distributed by nature impartially throughout the human race, and that she implants it as freely in the breast of the female as in that of the male. Once let it be implanted, and let it have fair play, untrammelled by nervous,

hesitating, shrinking, home-clinging tendencies, and it will infallibly lead its possessor to some bold departure from the everyday routine of existence that satisfies mortals of a more hum-drum temperament. A craving for continual change and excitement is a thing that is sure to assert itself vigorously and insist on being gratified, provided its possessor has also plenty of health and courage, and is unrestrained by the fetters formed from strong domestic attachments or other affection. Of people thus positively and negatively endowed it may be confidently predicted—whether their gender be masculine or feminine—that adventures will bestrew their road plentifully, meeting them at every turn, and seeming to seek them out and be attracted to them even as flies unto honey. I am myself an instance of this, as I can see plainly enough in reviewing my past career. At an earlier period I was less clear-sighted, and failed to perceive the restless spirit that had taken possession of me and become the constraining power of my life; but the lapse of a few years is a wonderful aid to discerning the true motives of former actions, and reminds me in this way of the dark blue spectacles which the man in charge of a smelting furnace puts on when he wants to see what is going on in his furnace. Without them he can distinguish

nothing in the fiery interior ; but the spectacles have the effect of softening the fierce, blinding glare, rendering visible what was before invisible, and enabling him to watch the progress of the red-hot seething masses of ore and metal undergoing fusion and transmutation under his care. And in like manner does intervening time clear the vision towards events, so that it is possible to estimate them far more justly some while after they have taken place, than it was at the moment of their occurrence. A retrospect, therefore, gives me a more correct notion of myself than I had before. I see how often, when I imagined myself to be solely impelled by some purely external circumstance, I was, in reality, also obeying the dictates of a longing for adventure and impatience of sameness, which have always had a very strong influence in determining my conduct. I detect how love of variety manifested itself as the principal cause of my actions, and made my course deviate widely from that of other ladies in my rank of life, and furnishes a reasonable explanation for behaviour which would else seem unaccountable. To a person of this disposition, monotony, dulness, and boredom in every shape are of course absolutely intolerable ; consequently I do not believe that any position involving these

drawbacks will ever content me for long, even though it may, in other respects, afford every advantage that the heart of man (or woman) can desire. And having supplied the reader with this much clue to a comprehension of the character of the individual whose story lies before him, I leave all further judgment upon me to be pronounced according to what is found in the pages of this veracious history, wherein I purpose faithfully to depict myself exactly as I appear in my own eyes, and as my life shows me to be.

A person's identity is materially affected (as regards both himself and others) by that of the immediate ancestors without whom he or she would not have existed at all; so the first step towards my self-introduction must obviously be to state my parentage.

My father, Sir Anthony Trecastle, a gentleman of small fortune serving in the Life Guards, was employed in London discharging the not very onerous duties expected from an officer of Heavies in time of peace, when he became acquainted and enamoured with a daughter of Lord Gilbert's. Sir Anthony's means were not sufficiently large for him to be reckoned anything of a matrimonial catch in that set of society to which both he and the young lady he admired belonged. He had

enough to live upon, however, besides being a tenth baronet, rather good-looking, and the representative of a family whose name was to be found in the Domesday Book ; therefore her relations and friends considered him to be a respectable though not brilliant match, made no attempt to interfere either for or against his suit, and left her perfectly free to please herself as to the answer it should receive. It was long before she could make up her mind in the matter ; but, after considering it for more than a year, she at last determined to accept him. What may have moved her to do this of course I cannot say ; but all I know of her character makes me think it more likely for the decision to have resulted from a reasonable and deliberate consideration of matrimonial pros and cons than from any love for her husband. Those who knew her well believed her to be so singularly cold and indifferent as never to have warmed into real love for any living creature during her whole life. And not only do my own recollections of her corroborate this opinion, but also I may say that I myself am a living argument to prove it true, inasmuch as I, too, am unusually exempt from the affectionate, tender emotions to which most men and women are liable ; and it seems reasonable to suppose that this extraordinary

cold-heartedness of mine must have been inherited from her.

I am sure it is an inheritance for which I have had much reason to be thankful ; for I have no doubt it has saved me from many a folly that I should otherwise have committed. A warm-hearted, soft, affectionate disposition is a possession which I have never coveted. It has generally seemed to me to be a cause of weakness rather than of strength to its owner ; and besides, it is very apt to hinder and stunt the development of that source of delight—the spirit of enterprise.

This, however, is somewhat of a digression, as the extent to which my mother may have cared for my father does not much concern this narrative ; at any rate she liked him sufficiently well to marry him, and that is all with which we need trouble ourselves here. He sold out of the army soon afterwards, and took his bride to reside at Castle Manor, as his country place was called ; there I, their only child, was born. Had I been a boy it was intended to call me Gilbert, in honour of my maternal grandfather's title ; as, however, I was a girl, and as my parents still wished to adhere as far as possible to their original intention of naming their first-born after the Gilbert peerage, the name was adapted to my sex by the addition

of three letters, and thus I received at my christening the somewhat uncouth appellation of Gilbertina. As this was obviously too much of a mouthful to be convenient for common domestic use, an abbreviation was inevitable, and the first one bestowed upon me was Jill. But this did not find favour with my mother. She declared it was ugly, and objectionably suggestive of low, republican ideas, such as carrying pails of water, rough tumbles, and cracked crowns; therefore Jill was condemned and Ina substituted, as a more graceful and aristocratic manner of shortening my name.

Though I allude to this small matter, because Jill was the name to which I afterwards returned, yet I do not purpose to dwell long upon the history of my life up to the age of eighteen, at which period I launched out boldly upon an independent career. Still, however, the earlier stages cannot be left altogether unnoticed, as the events which took place then naturally have a bearing upon subsequent ones, and also may be thought interesting for the part they probably played in the moulding of my character.

Was I born destitute of the ordinary instincts of filial affection—in which case, be it observed, that it would be most unjust to blame me for what was simply a natural deficiency? Or is the fault of

my defect in that way to be charged to my parents for having done nothing to develop the above-mentioned instinct? Anyhow, whatever the cause may have been, certain it is that they and I were mutually indifferent, and never saw more of one another than we could possibly help. They went their way, and I went mine, and the less we came in contact the better was I pleased. I regarded my mother as a sort of stranger whom the accident of inhabiting the same house caused me to see oftener than any other stranger, and who had an authority over me and my affairs which was decidedly irksome, because our opinions as to what it was right and fitting that I should do or not do were always at variance with one another. She disliked untidiness, whereas I revelled in being in a mess. Consequently she aggravated me continually by insisting on my going off to wash my face and hands or have my clothes put tidy, when I thought they did very well as they were, and would have preferred staying where I was. Again, mud-larking, and many other of my favourite occupations which brought about a torn and dirty state of garments, were strictly forbidden by her, to my great annoyance. Imagining the restriction to be imposed solely in the interests of my clothes, I well remember how rejoiced I was one day when

I thought I had hit upon a plan for enjoying myself after my own fashion without offending against her code, and how disappointed I was when my scheme proved a failure. I was about ten years old at the time, and was standing at the edge of a small stream, longing with my whole heart to go and paddle about in it, when it suddenly struck me that, as the edict against mud-larking and similar amusements was grounded upon the harm they did to my apparel, there could certainly be no objection to them provided nothing suffered except my own skin—that being an article which was surely of no consequence to any one but myself. Inspired by this brilliant idea, I immediately took off my shoes, stockings, gloves, and drawers, turned my sleeves back to the shoulder, wound my petticoats round my waist, and plunged into the stream; there I waded about with the utmost satisfaction, constructing mud-docks and sailing bark-boats without in the least minding the cuts and bruises inflicted on my bare feet by stones, or the numerous scratches which my unprotected arms and legs received from overhanging bushes and brambles. What did that matter when I was having such a glorious mud-lark? And I enjoyed the fun all the more because I believed fondly that I had a prospect of plenty more of the same kind

in the future, now that I had so cleverly discovered the way to get over the objection that had hitherto interfered with it. It must be clearly impossible for any one to find fault with a proceeding which exposed nothing but my own flesh to risks of rents and dirt.

Alas ! however, I was destined speedily to be undeceived. My mother, hearing how I had been engaged, gave me a tremendous scolding, declaring that she was quite shocked at me, and that if ever I did such a thing again I should be punished. For my part, I was perfectly amazed at this indignation, which seemed to me totally unreasonable, as I could not imagine what harm I had done. And the incident, like all others connected with her, strengthened the sulky injured feeling I had of being always wrong in her eyes. No matter what I might wish to do, she would forbid it, I thought.

I do not know that she was wilfully unkind to me, perhaps ; but she certainly never was actively kind ; and she stands out in my memory as a cold hard figure with which I could not come in contact without finding myself thwarted in some way or other, and being deprived of some pleasure. "Don't do that !" is a sentence odious in childish ears ; and as that was the sentence that I heard oftener than any other from her lips, I naturally got into

the habit of avoiding her company as much as possible—which was all the easier to manage because she had as little wish for my society as I had for hers, and only endured me with her at all, I think, out of regard to the *convenances* of English life. Never once do I remember her to have taken the trouble to supply me with any pleasures which she approved of to replace those which she prohibited; nor did she ever bestow upon me presents, indulgences, or marks of affection. Though she never attempted to teach me anything herself, yet she had me do lessons, and insisted on my learning needlework, which was my especial aversion; and I knew she was the source for the tasks I hated, even though she did not personally impose them on me.

Such being the terms on which she and I stood to one another, is it to be wondered at that I should have feared and disliked her?

I was about twelve years old when she died. As I had by that time read with great interest a large number of juvenile story-books of the exaggerated sentimental and goody kind, I was thoroughly well up in the behaviour to be expected from any girl-heroine on the occurrence of such an event. I knew that her father would at once become the great object of her life, and that she

would devote herself utterly to the task of comforting him and endeavouring to replace Her (with a capital H) who was gone. Though the girl would of course be herself well-nigh crushed with grief, and indulge in paroxysms of sobs and tears whenever she was alone, yet she would heroically repress any public manifestation of distress, lest the knowledge and sight of it should increase that of her surviving parent. Her zeal on his behalf would know no bounds, and lead her to neglect the most ordinary precautions against illness for herself. This would appear in some absurd and wholly uncalled for act of self-devotion—such as sitting motionless for hours in a thorough draught and wet through, lest the sound of her moving might awake him as he slept in the next room, or something equally ridiculous ; and by a few insane performances of the same kind the way would easily be paved for the invariably thrilling climax. A pillow bedewed nightly with tears ; knife-like stabs of pain returning with increasing frequency ; blood-spitting neglected and kept secret ; pangs mental and bodily, concealed under a cheerful exterior ; there could be but one conclusion to such symptoms as these. The overtaxed strength would collapse suddenly ; consumption, decline, heart disease, or some other alarming illness, would

ensue; and then there would be either a few harrowing deathbed scenes, or else a miraculous recovery and happy marriage of the heroine; in this last case her spouse would of course be some paragon young man, who should be in every respect ideally perfect, and thoroughly able to appreciate and do justice to the treasure whom he had been so fortunate as to win for a wife.

So invariably did this style of thing take place whenever the heroine lost her mother in the books which I had devoured greedily without perceiving how morbid and exaggerated they were, and without doubting their being faithful representations of human nature, that I had a sort of hazy impression of its being the inevitable accompaniment of that loss, whatever might have been the terms hitherto existing between the parties concerned. The folly of supposing that I could feel deep regret for a person whom I had always avoided as much as possible never occurred to me, and I was disposed to believe that what was described in the stories was an indispensable sequence of events that came after one another as naturally as spring follows winter, and summer follows spring. In that case, I too, must expect to undergo the regular course of emotions like every one else. It would be a decidedly novel and mysterious experience,

and one that I was by no means sure would be pleasant, and I looked out anxiously for the first indications of its approach as though it had been some kind of sickness with which I was threatened. A gush of poignant grief for my mother, an intense yearning over and pity for my father, sleepless nights and untasted meals, were, I knew, the correct preliminaries to the state of affairs that I was anticipating. Two or three days passed, however, and I found to my surprise that I had still no inability to sleep and eat as usual ; no alteration in my former feelings about my parents, either living or deceased ; nor any other reason to think I was about to behave in the same manner as those sentimental young ladies about whom I had read. Then I became perplexed as to the cause of this difference between me and them. I had taken it for granted that the stories showed exactly how human beings in general thought, felt, and acted ; but how came it then that I, who was unquestionably a human being, should find my own experience of a great occasion of this kind so different from what the books depicted ? The only way of accounting for it was by supposing either that they were not as true to nature as I had believed, or else that I must be unlike the rest of my fellow-creatures ; and as it did not at all please

me to consider myself an abnormal variety of the human species, I adopted the former theory as the probable explanation of what puzzled me. No one, thought I, ever dreams of judging fairy-tales by the standard of real life ; and no doubt those stories that I fancied were true are in reality only fairy-tales in disguise. The characters are not real men and women, but only make-believe ones ; and they are really just as impossible as if they were called ogres, gnomes, elves, magicians, or something of that kind.

It was a relief to me to arrive at this conclusion, and realise that there was no likelihood of my following in the steps of the afore-mentioned fictitious damsels ; for, however attractive their experiences might be to read about, I had had very considerable misgivings as to whether I should find them equally pleasant to undergo in my own person. I may add that I am sure my incapacity for imitating them was a most fortunate circumstance for my father ; he would, I am convinced, have been at his wits ends to know what to do with a daughter of the story-book stamp, and would have been unutterably taken aback and annoyed at any hysterical demonstrations of devotion or attachment on my part.

CHAPTER II.

FOREIGN TRAVEL.

It is time to say a few words as to what my father was like. Intensely selfish, and hating trouble, he was also extremely sociable, jovially disposed, easily amused, and endowed with an enviable facility for shaking off whatever was disagreeable. He seemed to consider everything unpleasant, dull, sad, or gloomy, as a sort of poisonous external application which must be got rid of promptly, lest it should get absorbed into the system. Consequently he never allowed anything to make a deeper impression on him than he could help. And in order to escape at once from the depressing influences of his wife's death he resolved to go abroad immediately after the funeral, and stay away for a good long time, wandering from place to place where his fancy took him, so as to distract his mind from all possibility of melancholy by a complete change of scene and life.

As he did not see the use of keeping up an

establishment in England during his absence, he determined to let Castle Manor. Then came the question of what was to be done with me under these circumstances? His relations assured him that the best plan would be to send me to school somewhere till he should again be settled in his own home. After reflecting for a day on this suggestion, he considerably astonished those who had made it by announcing that he meant to take me abroad with him. Such a determination was certainly surprising on the part of one who could not endure trouble, and had no affection for me. But the fact was that since his marriage he had got so much accustomed to the feeling that there was some one belonging to him always within reach, that he did not now like to live quite alone again; and therefore he thought he might as well have me handy as a last resource to fall back upon for company when none other should be attainable. Wherever he went, therefore, there I went also; and for that reason we were supposed by many people to be wholly wrapped up in one another, and a touching example of parental and filial attachment. I accidentally overheard some remarks to that effect made one day by a couple of compatriots staying at the same hotel as ourselves at Naples; and, child as I was, I remember

that I laughed cynically to think how wide of the truth they were, and what fools people were to be so ready to judge from appearances. For though he chose to have me living under the same roof as himself, yet he never had any wish for my society if he could pick up any one else to talk to, and walk, ride, drive, or make expeditions with ; and as his sociability and geniality made it easy to him to make acquaintance and fraternise with strangers, he was not often dependent upon me for companionship ; so that I was left very much to myself, and spent the greater part of the time in solitude, or with my attendant who was a sort of cross between nursery-governess and maid.

We moved about from place to place for two or three years, rarely staying long anywhere, and not once returning to England. This roving existence had a great charm for me, notwithstanding its frequent loneliness, and was infinitely more to my taste than would have been the orthodox school-room routine that falls to the lot of most girls between the ages of twelve and fifteen. Doubtless, too, it had a good deal of influence on the formation of my character ; for the perpetual motion and change of scene in which I delighted could hardly fail to foster my inborn restlessness and love of adventure, as well as to develop whatever

natural tendencies I possessed towards self-reliance, independence, and intolerance of restraint.

Meanwhile my education, as may be supposed, pursued a somewhat erratic course ; and my standard of attainments would, I fear, have by no means been considered satisfactory by Mrs. Grundy. A life passed in hotels, *pensions*, and lodgings is unfavourable to regular studies ; and, besides that, there was no one, after my mother's death, who cared sufficiently about my intellectual or moral progress to take the trouble of insisting on lessons being persevered with, whether I liked them or not. Consequently I learnt anything that took my fancy, and left alone everything else. On some out-of-the-way subjects I was better informed than the majority of my contemporaries ; but then, on the other hand, I was ignorant of much that every schoolgirl is expected to know. My ideas, for instance, as to religious matters were extremely vague. I was but slightly acquainted with the contents of either the Bible or Prayer Book ; never thought of religion as a thing with which I, personally, had to do ; had not a notion of what constituted the differences between one form of religious belief and another ; and never attended any place of worship except when some grand function was to come off. All I cared for

in such a place was to listen to the music, and stare at the lights, vestments, decorations, ceremonial, and crowd; therefore I only went on great festivals, or when some especially prized relic was to be exhibited, or other unusual attraction offered; and, of course, I became more familiar with the interior of Roman Catholic churches and chapels than any other.

What accomplishments I possessed were such as would have qualified me well enough for a courier, and I think that I could have earned my livelihood in that line of business without much difficulty after I had been abroad for a while. I could speak several languages fluently, besides having a smattering of a few more, and of two or three *patois*; I was well up in the relative values of foreign coins, and capable of making a bargain even with such slippery individuals as drivers, jobmasters, *laquais-de-place*, or boatmen. Besides that, I was so thoroughly at home in railway stations that I could find my way about in any hitherto-unvisited one almost by instinct; I could usually tell, to within a few minutes, the exact time when any *rapide* or *grande-vitesse* was due to start from Paris for Spain, Germany, Italy, or the Mediterranean; when it ought to reach its destination; and at about what hour it would be at the

more important towns on its route; and I had quite mastered the intricacies of the *English and Foreign Bradshaw*, *Livret-Chaix*, and works of a similarly perplexing kind, so as to be able to discover easily whatever information they could afford. My expertness in this way was chiefly owing to a happy thought that came into my head at Bayonne one day when I happened to be left alone for the afternoon with nothing to do, and no book whatever available except a railway guide. The prospect till night was not an exhilarating one, and I was disconsolately wondering how to get through the time, when it suddenly occurred to me that I would play at being about to start for St. Petersburg, or some other remote place, and obliged to look out the best and fastest way of getting there. I set to work accordingly with the railway guide, and became so engrossed in the game I had invented that I forgot all about the passage of time, and was quite astonished to find how quickly the afternoon slipped away whilst I was settling various journeys to my satisfaction. Such an easily-attainable means of amusement was a glorious discovery to me, and one which I commend to the notice of other travellers as a resource for wet weather and dull moments. Henceforth I had no dread of lacking amusement,

provided I had a time-table; and many a long hour have I beguiled in planning skeleton tours to all kinds of places—poring over the times of arrival and departure of trains, diligences, steamers, and other public conveyances, and weighing in my own mind the prices and comparative merits of various routes with every bit as much care and attention as though the imaginary journey under consideration were a reality, and I were the sole person responsible to make arrangements for it. This employment had for me something of the same sort of fascination that working out a problem in algebra has for some people—indeed I do not think the two things are greatly unlike each other in their natures.

Besides the accomplishments I have mentioned, I had also some ideas as to foreign cookery, which I picked up here and there on our travels—chiefly on the rare occasions when we were in lodgings anywhere. I do not think I ever met any mistress of a lodging-house abroad who did not pride herself particularly upon her cooking of some one dish (sometimes more than that, but at least one), and who was not willing to initiate into its mysteries any lodger who evinced a proper appreciation of its excellence. There was an old woman at Genoa, I remember, at whose house we stayed

for some weeks, who knew several delicious ways of dressing maccaroni and vegetables, and who not only allowed me to watch her whilst she cooked, and gave me her favourite recipes, but even stretched her good nature so far as to let me try my own hand in the kitchen till I could join practice to theory, and produce a tolerably successful result for my labours. She was a kindly, motherly old soul, who was impressed with the notion that there was something peculiarly forlorn and provocative of pity in my condition; she generally called me *poverina* (to my amusement), and took me under her protection from an early stage of our acquaintance.

“See, *Signorina*,” she said to me on the second morning of our occupying her apartments, “you will no doubt wish to buy velvet here—as all the English do—and many other things also. But be guided by me, and go not to buy alone, or you will most certainly be cheated. No! when you see the thing that you desire, come to me—take me to where it is—point it out to me quietly. Then will I go forward as though to buy it for myself, and so shall you procure it at a reasonable price. You who understand not the modes of our merchants, would pay nearly, or perhaps even altogether—for there is no saying how far the folly of an English

person may go!—the amount that they demand for their goods. But as for me!—ah! *I* know how to arrange these people, and you shall see what I will do! I dare to flatter myself that there is not a man or woman in the whole of Genoa who can get the better of me in a bargain!”

Experience soon showed me that this was no idle vaunt. Though—to her great disappointment—I declined to buy any velvet, yet I gladly availed myself of her services for other purchases, and never in my life, either before or since, have I met with any one who was her match in bargaining. She never bought anything at a shop or stall without having taken a final farewell and departed from it at least twice, and then suffered herself to be brought back by the persuasions of the owner; I think she regarded this going away and returning as quite a necessary part of the negotiation, without which it could not possibly come to a proper conclusion. At all events her efforts were invariably successful, and she forced shopkeepers, market-people, and sellers of every sort with whom she had dealings, to accept reductions of price which seemed to me almost incredible. Meanwhile I, in whose behalf she was exerting herself, used merely to assist as a passive spectator, feeling that my knowledge of mankind was being enlarged,

and that I was gaining a valuable insight into the amount of dishonesty and cunning that was latent in human beings in general, and Italians in particular. This was especially my feeling when, as more than once happened, I perceived that my friend herself was not altogether exempt from the failings of her country-people ; and that, relying on my knowledge of Italian being less than it really was, she was making a little profit at my expense out of the transaction she was conducting for me. This was a fresh revelation of the depravity of human nature, and impressed upon my youthful mind the folly of trusting absolutely to any professions of friendship, however genuine they might appear. But, after all, it was not to be expected that she would take a great deal of trouble for a stranger gratuitously and out of pure love ; besides that, she allowed no one except herself to cheat me, so that in the end my pocket was saved, notwithstanding the commissions that she managed adroitly to retain for her own benefit ; and as, furthermore, I derived much instruction from her in the art of bargaining, I saw that on the whole I was a gainer by her help, and had nothing to complain of. So I let her act for me as before, chuckling inwardly at her vehement denunciations of the roguery that surrounded us, and not

telling her of what I had discovered regarding her own.

I remember but little of most of the innumerable people with whom my father was continually making acquaintance; they seemed to me to come and go in endless succession, having to do with us only for a few days or hours, and then vanishing into space, with about as much likelihood of our ever seeing them again as though we had all been so many dead leaves whirled away by gales from opposite directions. But there was one of these stray acquaintances who made more impression on me than the rest, and whom I mention here because of the relations which she and I were destined to have together in the future—little as we then suspected it.

Kitty Mervyn, the individual in question, was a girl of about a year older than myself, clever, vivacious, and agreeable, and promising to be very good-looking by the time she should be seventeen. She and I were cousins in some far-off degree, because her father, Lord Mervyn, was a cousin many times removed of my grandfather, Lord Gilbert. The cousinship, however, was so remote that we did not know of each other's existence; and my father and the Mervyns had never happened to meet until they arrived one evening at the

hotel at which we were staying at Lugano. Then the distant connection served as an introduction between us; and as the next day was a dreary wet Sunday, the feeling of ennui and desire to kill time that was common to us all, led to our seeing more of one another than we should probably have done otherwise. Kitty and I paired off together naturally, as being nearly of the same age. As far as I can recollect, we spent most of the day in watching and laughing at the performances of some embryo bicyclists, who were too enthusiastic to be deterred by either rain or frequent tumbles, and who went on grinding perseveringly on their bicycles up and down a bit of road in sight of our windows which was their practice-ground. We did not find it very lively, certainly; but then there was nothing else to do, unless we had struck up a romantic friendship and exchanged sentimental confidences—as some girls thus situated would have done—and neither she nor I were at all disposed for that sort of thing. Our intercourse lasted only for that one day, as next morning the Mervyns departed south, whilst we went to Como. But in the short time I had been with Kitty she had somehow made a stronger impression than usual on my unimpressionable mind, and the recollection of her lingered in my memory longer

than that of any one else whom we met. Her good looks attracted me ; her cleverness and liveliness made her very good company. Notwithstanding an incipient haughtiness about her, which might develop as she grew older, perhaps, she seemed at present to have a decided capacity for being what I called jolly ; and, altogether, she had given me the idea of being remarkably likeable. I was sorry that the chances of travel made us separate so soon, and wondered if she was at all inclined to return the liking which I had taken to her. But she passed out of my head after a while ; and it was only now and then that I recollected her existence, and thought how pleasant it would be if we happened to meet again some day.

CHAPTER III.

A WIDOW'S MANŒUVRES.

THE life of travelling companion to my father being very much to my taste, I was naturally disgusted at its coming to a conclusion. This happened when I was about fifteen, and was caused by an event to which I objected strongly, and which was destined to have a most important effect on my subsequent existence.

We were making a tour through Holland and Friesland, and, when at Amsterdam, happened to make acquaintance with a Mrs. Grove, a widow, accompanied by two daughters, who were respectively two and three years older than me. I did not take to her at all, and thought she seemed a flattering, lying, pushing, cringing, vulgar individual ; but having carelessly thought that much of her, I dismissed her from my mind as a person with whom I had nothing to do, and whose character was quite immaterial to me—little thinking what a *bête noire* she was to prove to me afterwards !

She was on the look-out for a successor for the deceased Mr. Grove ; and as my father appeared to her to be a very suitable person for the vacancy, she began at once to lay siege to his affections. She did not, however, wish to show her hand too plainly at first, by attaching herself to us so openly as to make it obvious that she meant to pursue us from place to place. Therefore, the plan she adopted was, to discover, by apparently careless questioning, whither Sir Anthony's wayward fancy was likely to take him next ; having done this, she would direct her own course to the same district, go to some principal town in it which we should be pretty sure to visit sooner or later, wait for us there, and then pretend to be greatly surprised when we arrived, and to consider the meeting a purely accidental one. For instance, my father intended to go from Friesland to Münster, which he considered would be good headquarters whence to go to the neighbouring town of Soest, where he wanted to see the *Wiesen Kirche*, and other specimens of Gothic architecture. He had spoken of this in Mrs. Grove's presence, so that she was quite aware of his intentions in the matter. Consequently there occurred what she called a curious coincidence, as she also was moved by the self-same thirst for archæological studies at that particular

time; and thus when we reached Münster from Winschoten, we found her already installed in the former city before us. At Cassel and at Frankfort did we again fall in with her; and on the very first night of our being at Heidelberg she and her daughters joined us under the walls of the old castle, as we sauntered about in the dark and admired the brilliant fireflies.

Sir Anthony was too much a man of the world to ascribe these perpetually recurring meetings entirely to chance, and soon began to have a shrewd suspicion of the widow's intentions. Then he took to amusing himself with her, withholding information as to his movements when she cross-questioned him about them, putting her on a wrong scent, and otherwise baffling her curiosity. Once or twice he joked about the matter with me (towards whom she affected extreme friendliness), and asked me whether I thought she wanted him as a match for herself or for one of the daughters? This behaviour of his calmed the state of perturbation into which I had been previously thrown; for I was most indignant at the notion of her wanting to marry him, and was in a terrible fright lest she should succeed. For one thing the mere idea of a stepmother was repugnant to me—be she who she might; and besides that, I had not the

slightest confidence in the sincerity of Mrs. Grove's demonstrations of affection for me, which were, I felt sure, only assumed in order to ingratiate herself with my father; for I saw that she—like every one else—was misled by appearances, and took it for granted that a man who insisted on taking his daughter with him wherever he went, must be so devoted to her as to be certain to entertain kindly feelings towards any one who should appear fond of her. But my anxiety was relieved when I found that he was by no means blind to her designs, and was quite ready to laugh at them openly, and to take a mischievous pleasure in teasing her. That reassured me, and made me feel satisfied that her labours were in vain, and that I had nothing to apprehend from them.

This easy tranquillisation of my fears just showed my youth and inexperience. Had I been somewhat older I should have known what irresistible power over men almost all widows possess—which is the natural result of the insight into man's nature that they have acquired already, during their first matrimonial experiences. Mrs. Grove was no exception to the rule, and was as dangerous a widow as need be—having a thorough knowledge of the weaknesses of the male character and of the way to humour them, and understand-

ing perfectly how to make herself agreeable to any lord of creation whom fortune might throw in her way.

It was no part of her tactics to leave Sir Anthony long in doubt that it was for herself, and not for either of her daughters, that she desired to captivate his affections. She was certainly vulgar ; but as, also, she was a comely, well-preserved woman of little more than forty, who looked rather less than her age, it tickled his vanity pleasantly to find himself attractive to her ; and notwithstanding his having ridiculed her for setting her cap at him, he did not, nevertheless, altogether dislike it in the bottom of his heart. It was true that he had not previously contemplated marrying again ; but then that was only because he had not yet met any particular person to suggest the thought to him since my mother's death ; and he had been sufficiently occupied and amused with his travels for the notion not to have occurred to him of itself. Now, however, that the idea was thus put into his head, he began to reflect upon the matter seriously ; the more he considered it—being all the while insensibly influenced in its favour by the flattering attentions and blandishments of the widow—the more favourably did he regard it, and presently came to the conclusion that a wife was really

almost indispensable to his comfort. He could forgive a little vulgarity provided she had money to gild it ; and, feeling that Mrs. Grove's pecuniary circumstances had become suddenly interesting to him, he began putting out feelers on the subject when talking to her. He imagined himself to be going to work most diplomatically, and to have artfully concealed the true motive of his questions and remarks ; but the widow was more than a match for him. She at once detected his curiosity, and guessed the reason for it ; and managed cleverly to impress him with the idea that her jointure and settlements were considerably larger than was the actual case. Whether or not she would have accomplished her purpose without this stratagem, it is impossible to say ; but, at any rate, it did what she intended it to do, and brought matters to a climax. The belief that a rich wife was to be had, and that it would be foolish of him to miss such an opportunity, put an end to his irresolution. He proposed, and was accepted ; and within two months from the time that they were introduced to each other at Amsterdam, she succeeded in attaining what she desired, and became Lady Treastle.

Her ladyship, being a thorough John Bull at heart, had no great fondness for foreign places and

people. She had come to the continent because she believed it to be a likely hunting-ground whereon to find a husband ; and as soon as she had secured her prey she did not care about staying abroad any longer. Another thing that made her wish to return to her native land was, that she was extremely proud of the newly-acquired handle to her name, and was burning to air it amongst those who would properly appreciate it ; for what country is there in Europe, Asia, or Africa (about America I say nothing), where a title produces so much effect, and is so bowed down to and worshipped as in that abode of snobs—England ? Therefore, as soon as she was engaged to Sir Anthony, she determined to endeavour to make him give up his nomadic existence, return home, and settle there. By way of paving the way in this direction she would reproach him, half in jest and half in earnest, for being an absentee, and having no proper patriotic spirit ; or else she would deliver a harangue upon the roguery of most agents, and the folly of leaving property to be managed by them instead of looking after it in person ; and with these and similar observations, she sought to bring him to wish himself to do the thing that she desired should be done. Finding him more inclined to listen to her than she had

expected, she grew bolder, and passed from hints to a more direct expression of her desires. He was evidently not greatly averse to discontinue his foreign rambles, as I perceived with sorrow. The fact was that he had only gone abroad because my mother's death gave him gloomy and disagreeable associations with his house, and on that account he had taken a temporary dislike to it; but his facility for getting rid of whatever was unpleasant had made him quite shake off that feeling of dislike by now. Before long Mrs. Grove had worked upon him so far that he began even to feel eager to return home, and to look forward with pleasurable anticipation to the idea of showing the place to its new mistress, and introducing her to the society of the neighbourhood.

I said what I could to oppose going back to England whenever I had an opportunity; but alas! what chance had I against the influence of the widow? Of course she carried her point without difficulty; and, to my great grief, notice to quit was sent to the tenants of Castle Manor. It so happened that there were accidental circumstances which made it convenient to the tenants to leave at once, without waiting for the expiration of the term of the notice, and thus the house was vacated at an unexpectedly early date. No sooner was

this the case than Sir Anthony and Lady Treastle returned home and established themselves there, accompanied by their joint families, which consisted of Margaret Grove, aged eighteen; Jane Grove, aged seventeen; and myself, aged rather more than fifteen.

CHAPTER IV.

A TIGHT CURB.

WHEN an indolent, easy-going, trouble-hating man, such as my father, marries an energetic, bustling, authority-loving woman, such as Mrs. Grove, it is not hard to foresee which of the two will bear rule in the establishment. A very brief acquaintance with Sir Anthony sufficed to show the widow that, with a little management on her part, she would be able to govern the household as she liked ; that as long as he was kept amused he would not bother himself to interfere with her arrangements ; and that all she need do in order to keep the reins entirely in her own hands, was to take care that her way and his were identical in whatever affected his personal comfort—she would then be free to please herself as far as all other things were concerned. She was not, at first, altogether easy in her mind as to how he would bear the discovery of what the real state of her money matters was ; which discovery, as she

knew, he must inevitably make soon, and might possibly cause him to be seriously angry with her. But she need not have feared this with a man of his disposition, who never worried himself about anything that could not be helped. Though he was, undoubtedly, much annoyed to find how much poorer she was than he had supposed, yet he reflected, with his usual philosophy, that it was no use making a fuss about it, now that he had married her, and that what could not be altered had better be made the best of. So he gulped down the disappointment with a wry face or two, and did not attempt to make her suffer for her deceitfulness as she deserved.

As soon as she was satisfied on this head, and felt that she was established in her seat securely, she turned her attention to me—who would infinitely have preferred being let alone. I had never trusted to the sincerity of the professions of affection she had lavished on me in the early stages of our acquaintance, when she had imagined me to be my father's especial pet; and it speedily became evident that this distrust of mine had been well founded. She thought it quite worth while taking trouble to keep the master of the house in good humour, and would study and humour his likes and dislikes in the most amiable

manner possible. But she saw no reason for extending the same consideration to a mere insignificant nobody ; and when she had discovered how little he cared for me, and that she might do as she pleased regarding me and my affairs without danger of interference from him, she proceeded to take my education in hand, and conduct it according to her own notions. As her ideas on the subject and mine were entirely different, and as the more she and I saw of one another the more we disliked each other, the result of this meddling of hers was fatal to my comfort. And the two or three years following my father's second marriage were so horribly dull and tedious to me that I cannot recall them without a shudder.

Everything seemed to go against me from the time of that wedding. In the first place, I resented having a stepmother, and finding myself forced suddenly into terms of intimacy with the three strangers (her and her two daughters) who had all at once become part of my family. Then came the termination of the foreign wanderings that I had found so pleasant. And now came the culminating misery of being under the commands of a selfish, vulgar, lying, bullying, stingy, pretentious, plausible, tyrannical woman, whom I could not endure, and who fully returned my dislike.

I had an unlucky knack of perpetually irritating her, and was always sure to be in the wrong in her eyes. Either I said or did something that was contrary to her notions of what I ought to have said or done ; or I scandalised her by displaying grievous ignorance of some subject which she deemed an essential branch of knowledge ; or else I shocked her prejudices in some other way. She was not the woman to put up quietly with offences of this kind in her own household, and proceeded without delay to attempt to remedy my deficiencies. Accordingly she informed my father that she considered my mental condition to have been neglected terribly ; that I had been allowed to run wild till I was very nearly ruined ; and that she saw no chance of my ever becoming a properly behaved young lady and decent member of society unless a governess were procured for me immediately, and I were kept strictly to the schoolroom until such time as I should come out. Should she, therefore, engage a governess ? My father, as usual, made no objection to a proposal which would in no way interfere with his own comfort. All he said was that she could do just as she thought best about it ; that he did not himself see much to complain of in me, and had thought I was not at all bad company, considering

my youth ; but that he had no doubt she understood better than him what was necessary for girls, and that whatever she did was sure to be right.

Armed with this permission, she at once took steps to carry out her intention, and a few days afterwards announced to me the contemplated innovation.

“ Your father and I have agreed, Ina,” she said, “ that it is high time to make a change in your present mode of life—you need to be put into harness for a bit and broken in. Therefore, I have engaged a governess for you, and she will be here next week. What I wish to impress upon you now is, that when she comes you must do what she tells you, and that I shall expect you to pass your time with her. I do not approve of your fondness for sitting in your own room ; nor yet of your habit of appearing continually amongst us elders when there are visitors here, just as if you were grown up and already introduced into society ! The drawing-room is *not* the proper place for a girl of your age. Remember that in future you are to remain always in the schoolroom when indoors ; and that, when not at lessons, you must employ yourself there in some quiet and ladylike pursuit—needlework perhaps, or something of that kind. And when you go out you will walk

with your governess, and not go climbing trees, or digging out rabbits, or racing all over the place like a wild thing, as you generally do."

The idea of being thus hampered and restrained filled me with dismay; and in my despair I appealed to my father, in hopes that he would protect my cherished liberty of action.

"Why should I have a governess at all?" I exclaimed to him; "I'm sure I've got on very well without, for ever so long! But even if I *am* to have one, surely I may be free of the hateful thing out of lesson-time, mayn't I? Just think how *horrid* it would be to be obliged to be always with her—sitting in the room with her all day, and only going for stupid, straight-on-end grinds along the hard high road with her when I go out! Do say that I'm not to be condemned to that, at all events!"

No doubt I was a fool for my pains, and ought to have known better than to suppose that I could move him to oppose his wife on my behalf. So the event proved, for he declined to interfere in the matter; and the only effect produced by my appeal was to strengthen Lady Treastle's hands by increasing her conviction of the extreme unlikelihood of my father's ever paying attention to any complaint that I might make to him. From that

time forth, therefore, she felt more secure than ever in her authority over me, and her tyranny increased accordingly. When the governess arrived I was kept immured in the schoolroom the greater part of each day, and was surrounded by a variety of petty restraints and restrictions which were enough to have worried any girl, and were especially vexatious and irksome to one who had had the unusual amount of independence which I had been enjoying of recent years. I found myself deprived of freedom; always under *surveillance*; obliged to learn uninteresting lessons; bored; and constantly tacked on to the petticoats of an individual whose office of governess made her necessarily hateful in my eyes, however charming—even angelic—she might really be. Of course such an existence was perfectly odious to me, and I do not think that I could have anyhow managed to endure it as long as I did, if I had not fortunately hit upon a means whereby I could to some extent relieve its dreary monotony. This resource consisted in victimising, to the extent of my power, any rash female who had undertaken to instruct me, playing off upon her ill-natured pranks of all kinds, and leaving no stone unturned to make her life a burden to her till I had fairly driven her out of the house.

What a dreadful confession of unamiability ! some reader may, perhaps, here exclaim. Well—I do not deny it. Be it remembered that the purpose of this narrative is, not to set forth an imaginary picture of virtue and excellence, but simply an accurate likeness of myself ; and I should evidently fail of accomplishing that purpose if I were to conceal or gloss over those sentiments which I really entertained and acted upon. But even if my behaviour *does* lay me open to the charge of unamiability, I do not think that that need be wondered at, when the peculiarities of my natural disposition, of my bringing-up, and of my whole circumstances, are taken into consideration.

The occupation of bullying and annoying my governesses to the utmost possible extent had a double recommendation in my eyes. Not only did it supply an ample field for my ingenuity, and give me something amusing to think about in the dreary walks and long hours spent in the schoolroom, but also it afforded me the satisfaction of retaliation. I had a savage joy in knowing that I was able to pay off my companion for some of the vexations that she was the means of inflicting on me ; and I relished the thought that even if I *did* have a rough time myself, yet at all events I did not suffer alone. Endless, therefore, were the tricks

and practical jokes which I used to devise and execute for the aggravation of whatever unlucky individual happened to have taken charge of my education; and so skilful was I in my operations that it was but seldom any piece of mischief could be traced home to me, however greatly I might be suspected of its authorship. I was an adept, too, at the art of being extremely insulting and provoking without saying anything that would seem a just cause of irritation if repeated to a third person. I knew how to speak with an offensiveness of voice and manner which gave an injurious significance to words that were in themselves innocent; and by this method I have often succeeded in making a governess wildly angry, although I had given her nothing tangible that could be taken hold of and brought against me to substantiate a charge of rudeness. If she complained that I had been impertinent, I assumed an air of injured innocence, repeated exactly what I had said, asked what harm there was in that? and declared that it was very unfair to blame me because Miss so-and-so had chosen to fly into a passion about nothing. In fact I was aggravating enough to have provoked the patient Grizzel herself; and as governesses are not much apt to be patient Grizzels in their relations to their pupils (how-

ever gentle and long-suffering they may make themselves appear to the heads of the establishment), our schoolroom was in a constant state of turmoil and ferment, and there was a remarkable difficulty in getting governesses to stay at Castle Manor. About a month or six weeks was generally enough to disgust them with the situation, and they rarely failed to give notice at the end of that time. This was an event that always gave me a sensation of unmixed satisfaction ; as, for one thing, I then felt that I had scored a fresh victory and routed another enemy, and also, I knew that the arrival of her successor could not fail to bring some small amount of variety into the monotonous routine of existence of which I was so deadly tired.

But this constant change of governesses over which I rejoiced, and which was chiefly my doing, was by no means equally agreeable to Lady Tre-castle. When an instructress went, it was she who had to procure a successor ; and she did not find it at all amusing to be incessantly answering advertisements, writing for characters, and that sort of thing. And as, notwithstanding the difficulty of ever actually *proving* a misdemeanour against me, she had strong doubts of my innocence, therefore she considered me responsible for the

bother she continually had about governesses, and regarded me with increased disfavour on that account. She had the sense to suspect that there would not be such endless storms in the school-room if the pupil were not unusually unmanageable and turbulent; and, acting on that opinion, she made several efforts to induce me to be more tractable, in order that thereby she might be saved the trouble that my conduct entailed upon her.

At one time she tried the effect of addressing serious rebukes and admonitions to me; but I cared not one straw for them. Then she increased the strictness of my confinement, and ordained that every disturbance should always be followed by the loss of the next half-holiday or other pleasure of which I might have a chance; but still I remained unsubdued. Then a third method of overcoming me suddenly struck her, and she one day wound up a lengthy scolding by declaring that her patience was at an end, that she would *not* stand the perpetual commotions I caused any longer, and that the very next time one occurred I should be packed off to some school at once.

Now it was all very well for her to talk big of sending me to school; but in point of fact I felt pretty sure that she would do nothing of the kind,

because it was very convenient to her to have a governess in the house on account of her own two daughters, for whom she did not want to go to the expense of masters, and who often needed assistance in the various accomplishments she wished them to acquire. This assistance they were in the habit of receiving from whoever happened to be in charge of me, though they were too old to be regularly in the schoolroom; and as my going to school would remove the ostensible reason for having a governess at Castle Manor, it was not at all likely that she meant to do what she said.

But though she knew the threat to be an empty one, that did not at all hinder her from uttering it. Being at her wits' end for something to hold over me *in terrorem*, it suddenly occurred to her that a girl who had always lived with her own belongings, as I had done, would probably dread the notion of being sent away alone amongst strangers, and that therefore the school project stood a very good chance of awing me into submission.

Instead of that, however, I evinced such delight at the prospect as took the wind out of her sails completely. I had not in reality the slightest objection to school, because it would be a change, and anything in the shape of a change would be welcome. And of course my manifestations of

delight were all the more exaggerated as I perceived her annoyance at finding me look forward joyfully to the thing she hoped I should have feared. Thus she was thoroughly discomfited; and never again did I hear her say I was to go to school, though I several times returned to the subject of myself, asking to know when I was going, saying I hoped it would be soon, etc. etc. I must say that I greatly enjoyed having triumphed over her so completely; and I reflected with malicious pleasure on the vexation and humiliation it must be to her to know that I had detected the emptiness of her threat, and could henceforth look down upon her with all the contempt which an utterer of such threats is sure to inspire.

But though I did what I could to procure a little change and excitement by making myself disagreeable, and plaguing my stepmother and teachers, yet the tedium of my life was so great as to be almost unendurable; and again and again did I consider the expediency of putting an end to it by running away from home, and trusting to my own resources for getting a livelihood. I used to meditate seriously on how the thing was to be done, arranging every detail, foreseeing and meeting probable obstacles, providing for possible contingencies, and working the whole scheme out from

beginning to end in my own mind. It seemed to me quite feasible ; and as I was not a bit afraid of failure, or of what might happen to me when cast upon the world by myself, I should certainly have put my idea into practice if there had not been one consideration which deterred me and kept me where I was. This was the thought that I was very nearly seventeen. At that age I was convinced that girls invariably came out, and therefore took it for granted that I should do so also. And as the yoke under which I groaned would be broken before long in the natural course of events, it seemed better to resign myself for the short space during which I should still be subject to it, rather than to anticipate the day of emancipation by so desperate a measure as running away from home.

But in my calculations as to the time of my being brought out, I had quite omitted one most important factor, viz. what might be my step-mother's wishes in regard to that matter. These, as it happened, were diametrically opposed to mine. She had no fancy to go about with three young ladies in tow, nor did she feel inclined to risk spoiling the matrimonial chances of Margaret or Jane by leaving either of them at home, and taking me out with her instead. Therefore she intended

to keep me back in a state of pupillage as long as possible, and to endeavour to get one or both of her own daughters married out of the way before I should make my appearance in society. In consequence of this private scheme of hers, the attainment of the age of seventeen, from which I had hoped such great things, produced no amelioration in my condition. I was astonished and disgusted to find that the days and weeks dragged heavily on at lessons as before, and brought no indications of the approach of that liberty to which I had looked forward confidently. Of course, I was not going to stand this without complaining, so I remonstrated with Lady Treycastle, declaring that I was being treated very unfairly, that every girl came out at seventeen, and that I ought now to be let to share equally with my step-sisters in whatever invitations for balls, dinners, or other gaieties might arrive at Castle Manor. My complaints were unheeded, however, and my grievance remained unredressed. I was not fit to go into society, she said ; I was so untrained, stupid, disagreeable, and bad-tempered, that she would be ashamed to take me out, and I must positively remain in the schoolroom till my manners and temper should be improved. Chafing and fretting under repeated disappointments, I managed to get

through another dreary year of monotony ; but when my eighteenth birthday arrived and found me still a prisoner in the schoolroom, I resolved not to stand this treatment any longer. It became evident to me that her ladyship destined me to play the part of Cinderella. As I had no fancy for that *rôle*, and as I had not a fairy godmother to come to my assistance, I must take the matter into my own hands and act fairy godmother for myself. Therefore I determined to execute the plan which I had already reflected upon so often, and to run away from home and take my chance of what might afterwards befall me.

CHAPTER V.

BREAKING LOOSE.

HAD running away from home been a brand new idea that had never before occurred to me, I dare say I should have had to postpone carrying it out till I had had time to mature the design and consider how it was to be accomplished. As it was, however, there was no need for delay on that account, for I had pondered on the subject often enough to be thoroughly familiar with it, and to have discovered a variety of methods for executing the project. In all these schemes there was one point which I had always kept steadily in view, and that was the importance of so arranging my flight as to secure myself a long start before my absence should be discovered. I had but little fear of managing to evade pursuit, if only I could get a good way ahead of it at first. I saw that the best means of ensuring this would be to have the coast clear of authorities when I took myself off. Therefore I determined to put off my depart-

ure for a few days longer, in order to avail myself of a particularly favourable opportunity which would then occur, as my father, step-mother, and two step-sisters would be going to stay away for a ball and other gaieties at a friend's house. When once they were out of the way, there would be no one to interfere with me except my governess, Miss Smith, and I thought it would be odd indeed if I could not manage to get rid of her also somehow or other. Several expedients whereby this might be effected soon suggested themselves to me, and after a little consideration I made up my mind to try to impose upon her with a sham telegram. She was a somewhat colourless individual, much given to writing letters and reading novels, nervous, easily fussed, sentimental, and possessing a sister named Alice who kept a school at Carlisle, and to whom it was evident that she was very much attached. Now I felt certain that if she believed this beloved sister to be in need of her, nothing would induce her to stay away, and that a telegraphic summons from Miss Alice Smith would cause my Miss Smith to rush off to Carlisle as fast as trains would take her there. Such a summons, therefore, I must contrive that she should receive. The only difficulty about forging the telegram I required for my purpose was that I

had not the proper paper or envelope ; the latter I might possibly contrive to do without, if necessary, but the former was absolutely indispensable, and if I could not get hold of a piece of it, I should have to relinquish the telegram scheme altogether and substitute some other.

In order to procure what I wanted I pretended to be in need of stamps, and upon that pretext went to the post-office at Greenlea, as our village was called. The post-office was also a telegraph-office and sort of general emporium, and was kept by an old man named Jones, who had been there for years, and was certain not to dream it possible that one of the ladies from Castle Manor should have nefarious designs upon any of the stores over which he presided. Having bought my stamps, and made one or two friendly remarks to the proprietor, I affected a sudden interest in the working of the telegraph, and was, as I expected, promptly invited behind the counter to inspect the machine more closely. The blank forms and envelopes requisite for sending out messages were lying close by amongst some other papers, and somehow I was awkward enough to upset the whole lot of papers together on the ground. " Oh how very stupid of me ! " I exclaimed, penitently, kneeling down as I spoke, and beginning to collect the

scattered papers ; “ I’ll pick them up again in a moment, Jones ; don’t you trouble ! ” What with old age and rheumatism, Jones’ joints were somewhat stiff, and he was not sorry to be saved from the necessity of stooping down in the rather confined space behind the counter.

“ Well, indeed, ’tis a shame for you to be doing that, Miss, and me looking on idle,” he replied ; “ but I’m much obliged to you, too, and I won’t say no to a good offer. We old folks ben’t quite so flippan’t to move ourselves up and down as you young ’uns be ; and it be a bit narrer in here atween the wall and the counter, you see.” So he complacently received the papers from me and restored them to their places as I handed them up in instalments ; and he never missed the telegraph form and envelope which I slipped swiftly into my pocket whilst his eyes were turned in another direction. I left his shop in triumph, having thus supplied myself with the means to which I trusted for removing Miss Smith off the premises ; and I was now all ready to commence operations as soon as my stepmother and her husband and daughters should take themselves off upon their intended visit.

The eventful day arrived, and I stood looking at them drive away from the house with a curious

mixture of feelings—partly gloomy and partly cheerful. There went these people who constituted my family, and I meant never to set eyes on them again if I could help it. They were going to lark about, dance, be jolly, and amuse themselves in all kinds of ways, and it was a horrid shame that I was not going too. I should have been, only that Lady Treastle would not let me have fair play, and had chosen to spite me and to treat me like a child when I was not one. I considered that she had behaved infamously to me. Other young people of my age and position could go to balls, enjoy themselves, have lots of fun, and frolic to their heart's content, and it was grossly unjust to debar me from doing the same. I was an oppressed and harshly-treated victim. I was being defrauded of my rights and ousted from my proper place through the enmity of a malevolent step-mother and the negligence of a father, who was too selfish and indolent to care what became of me, or any one else, as long as he was himself happy.

As I stood at the window watching the departing carriage, and meditating on the wrongs that had rankled long in my breast, and had now at last reached their culminating point, I felt a single burning tear gather slowly in each eye and brim

over on the cheek beneath. Weeping is not a weakness to which I am given, for I am, as a rule, one of the least tearful of mortals. But that tear was an exceptional one, and was drawn from me solely by a feeling of bitter resentment for past injuries, not by any foolish regrets or sentimentality relating to my approaching separation from both home and family.

Mingled with these disagreeable thoughts, however, there was also present in my mind an exhilarating idea, which soon dispelled the unpleasant ones even as the sun disperses cloud. How could I mind anything now that liberty was so close at hand? What did it matter that Lady Treastle had been able to convert my home into a hateful prison, now that I was about to break my bonds and cut myself adrift from it? Those people whose departure I had just watched should find a little surprise awaiting them on their return, in the shape of my disappearance! Freedom, novelty, and adventures lay before me. Without these things life was not worth having, and I was on the brink of enjoying them. Hurrah! The wide world was going to be open to me, and I was about to enter on an unknown future, wherein everything would be different from the past. The thought of all this made my pulses throb with

excitement, and filled me with wild eagerness for the first taste of the anticipated joys.

I did not mean to deliver the forged telegram to Miss Smith till it should be nearly time for the train, by which I expected that she would go to Carlisle, to leave Sparkton—that being the name of our nearest town. As that train did not start till past four o'clock in the afternoon, and as Sir Anthony and Lady Treastle and her daughters had left home in the morning, I had to control my impatience for some hours longer. Part of this time I employed in preparing the telegram. Upon the blank form I scrawled in a feigned hand as follows—"Alice Smith, Carlisle, to Miss Smith, Castle Manor, Greenlea, Sparkton. *Come without losing a moment. I need your help immediately.*" Having enclosed this in the proper envelope of thin yellow paper, and directed it to Miss Smith, I did not neglect also to fill in the blank spaces on the outside with the requisite information as to the time when the message was sent out, when handed in, etc. I knew that she would probably be far too much perturbed by the telegram to notice any little irregularity about its appearance, but, for all that, I meant to be on the safe side, and to have everything in order, so that there might be no possible ground for suspicion.

When the due time had arrived for me to spring the mine that I had prepared for her I betook myself to the schoolroom, where she was engaged as usual in inditing epistles to some of her numerous correspondents. The precious telegram was in my hand, and I proceeded to deliver it to her, and also to account for the unusual circumstance of its being brought by me instead of by a servant, according to the ordinary course of things.

“Here’s something for you,” I said; “I went out to pick some flowers just now, and as I was coming back towards the house I overtook a child from Greenlea with this in its hand. Of course I saw at a glance that it was a telegram—one can’t mistake the appearance of the article—and I asked which of the household it was for. Its for you; and as I was coming straight in then I thought I would bring it myself, and save the child having to come any farther.”

The mere sight of the telegram sufficed to flutter Miss Smith’s nerves, and her fingers shook visibly as she opened it. The instant she had perused its contents she jumped up in a tremendous state of agitation, and exclaimed: “Good gracious! it’s from my sister Alice! She wants me immediately, but doesn’t say what’s the matter.

What *can* have happened? Perhaps she's ill! I must go to her at once. What trains are there? Isn't there a *Bradshaw* somewhere? *That's* not it, nor *that*, nor *that*!"

As she spoke she hurriedly took up one after another of the books lying near, and examined their titles to see if either of them was a *Bradshaw*, although there was nothing in the room that bore any resemblance whatever to the well-known work. But she was a great deal too much upset to notice that. I, however, needed no *Bradshaw* to enable me to give her the information she wanted, as I had already ascertained exactly the starting-time of the next train that would suit her, and had it at the tip of my tongue.

"The last train to the North from Sparkton starts at 4.20 in the afternoon, I know," I answered; "that's the one for you to go by, and if you go at once you'll just have time to catch it. Better go and get ready as fast as you can, and I'll order the carriage to take you to the station."

"Yes, yes, that'll be the way; thank you so much," she returned, beginning to hasten towards the door. Before she had quite reached it a sudden thought struck her, and she turned round with a look of consternation, exclaiming, "Oh dear! I quite forgot that you'll be all alone! I'm

afraid Lady Trecastle won't like it. How unlucky for her just to have gone away! But really what *can* I do? Read the telegram yourself, Ina; you'll see it's absolutely *imperative* I should go at once. My poor, dear Alice! I'm sure something quite *dreadful* must have happened to make her send for me like this. It can't be any *trifle*, I know, for she is one of the calmest, least excitable mortals on the face of the earth!"

She's not much like you, then, was my inward reflection, as I looked at the spectacle of pitiable nervousness presented by my governess, with her fingers twitching aimlessly to and fro, and her face expressing feeble and helpless apprehension of evil. Indeed, I was not altogether free from a feeling of compunction for being the means of throwing her into such a state of distress, which must continue, as I knew, till she should reach Carlisle, and discover that the telegram had been a sham. But then she had to be got out of the way somehow or other, and it would never do for a young woman who meant to make her own way in the world, as I did, to be squeamish about inflicting pain on other people if necessary; and after all it was partly her own fault for having become the governess of a person who did not want one at all. Besides that, the more miserable she

was now, the greater would be her joy and relief when she should learn that her fears were unfounded. Really the bliss of that moment would be so exquisite that I quite looked forward to it on her account!

When she handed me the telegram I of course affected to have no previous knowledge of its contents, and even made believe to have a difficulty in making out one or two of the words. Having read it through, I said, "Oh certainly, you're bound to go at once; there can't be a doubt of that. Don't bother yourself about Lady Treastle; I'll tell her exactly how the matter was. You know she and my father will be back in a couple of days, and I shall be all right till their return. But you'll lose your train if you don't look sharp now."

Reassured by this speech, she hurried off to get ready, whilst I rang the bell to order the carriage. It was an object to me to have her out of the room when I did this, as her absence enabled me at the same time that I ordered the carriage to send word to the cook that no dinner would be wanted that night. Miss Smith, I said, had been called away suddenly, and I meant to travel with her a short distance, to the house of one of my aunt's, with whom I should stay until Sir Anthony and Lady

Trecastle returned. There was nothing unlikely about my paying a visit to my aunt when left alone unexpectedly; and I made this announcement to prevent the servants from becoming alarmed at my disappearance, and bringing about a premature discovery of my flight by communicating at once with my father.

I next went to Miss Smith to tell her that I was coming with her as far as the station to see her off; I said that I knew my father wanted to have some things mended at a shop in Sparkton, and that I thought I might as well avail myself of this opportunity of taking them to the town, now that the carriage was going there with her. Of course the discrepancy between this statement and the one which I had just made for the benefit of the household would become apparent, and put me into an awkward position, if she and the servants should happen to compare notes as to what I had been saying. But I felt I could reckon confidently that no such comparison would take place; as, for one thing, my governess was a deal too much flurried and taken up with her own affairs to think of anything else; and, for another thing, my precaution of not delivering the telegram till there was only just time to catch the train, prevented her from having time for idle

conversation, even if she *had* happened to feel disposed for such a thing.

I had had considerable difficulty in making up my mind what to do about luggage. If I did not take any, that would look odd to the servants, who believed me to be going to stay with my aunt; but then Miss Smith, on the other hand, who fancied that I was merely going to drive into Sparkton to see her off, would be astonished at any appearance of boxes, bags, or portmanteaux that indicated an intended absence from home. Besides that, it would not suit my plan of action to be encumbered with anything that I could not manage easily to carry through the streets with my own hands.

I had considered this knotty point for some time before I could determine how to settle it. What I finally resolved upon was to take a small hand-bag which was just large enough to hold sufficient wearing apparel for a two night's visit (so as to impose upon the servants), and which was yet not too large for me to be able to carry about easily. Then, if my governess should make any remarks about its presence in the carriage, and wonder what I wanted it for, I could tell her that it contained the things for my father that were going to be mended. Into this hand-bag I had already

packed all the jewellery I possessed, and as many clothes and other articles likely to come useful as there was room for. Thus all my preparations were completed, and I was ready for a start.

I did not wish to go away without bidding adieu to Lady Treastle, so I had written her a farewell letter ; and whilst Miss Smith was putting on her things, I placed it where my stepmother would be certain to find it on her return. It ran thus—

“LADY TRECASTLE—In my opinion it is high time for me to see the world and enjoy myself like other people, and as you seem resolved that I shall do nothing of the kind, I am going to settle the matter without asking your leave. I have timed my departure to suit the sailing of a vessel which is going where I wish to go, and by the time you receive this I shall be out of England and far away. You and I have hit it off together so badly, that I have no doubt you will regard my leaving as a subject for sincere congratulations—which permit me to offer to you. I fear that you will not receive them from any one else, on account of the hypocritical appearance of grief under which you are sure to think it necessary to conceal your real joy. I foresee also that you will affect the utmost anxiety to recover me ; this

will, of course, involve a considerable amount of expense, since you will find it difficult to satisfy Mrs. Grundy of the sincerity of your protestations, unless you employ detectives, and send out far and wide in search of me. I reflect on all this with pleasure, for I know well how you will grudge every penny that is spent on so unworthy an object as myself; and as I have no fear of being found, I am sure that the money will be spent in vain. Think of that, Lady Treastle, you who hate waste—think of all that you'll have to throw away on *my* account! Sincerely trusting that you and I may never meet again, and that Margaret and Jane may be able to continue their studies without the assistance which they have hitherto received from the governesses who were supposed to be engaged for my sole benefit—Believe me to remain, yours in no sense at all, INA TRECASTLE."

It is not to be supposed from this letter that I had any idea of going straight abroad; on the contrary, I had made up my mind to get to London as quickly as possible, and there to hide myself, and be lost to pursuit by the time that my flight should be known. But I put in the bit about leaving England on the chance of Lady Treastle's believing it to be my real intention, and being

thereby thrown on the wrong track, and caused extra worry and expense. She being my especial enemy, I wanted to annoy her as much as I could ; and as my father always managed to slip out of whatever was troublesome, I knew that all the bother of the search after me would certainly fall upon her shoulders, and that the more troublesome and costly it was, the more my longing for revenge would be gratified.

It cost me nothing to leave my father. Since his second marriage he and I had seen but little of each other—I having been kept closely in the schoolroom, and he not having troubled himself to alter whatever arrangements his wife thought fit to make. Whether I were at home or not would make no difference to him I knew. I cared for no one, and no one cared for me, exactly describes the condition in which I was on that afternoon when I drove off from Castle Manor with my tearful and apprehensive governess, to catch the 4.20 train at Sparkton. I was leaving a home wherein was no person or thing that was dear to me, where there was nothing for me to regret, to which I was bound by no sweet or tender associations, and which had no kind of hold over me. And I was about to exchange dulness and dreary monotony for action, adventures, excitement, and

an unknown state of existence, where I must be always on the alert, ready for everything, and trust to no one except myself. To all this I looked forward with a delight that was not marred by the faintest tinge of timidity, anxiety, or fear of failing in what I had set myself to accomplish. No wonder that I was radiant with joy, and found some difficulty in preserving my usual demeanour sufficiently not to arouse Miss Smith's suspicions.

CHAPTER VI.

A PHOTOGRAPH.

THERE are two railway stations in Sparkton, which is a town of sufficient size and importance to have two different railway companies competing for its patronage ; and this circumstance rendered it all the easier for me to escape without leaving traces for any pursuers to follow. The train by which I intended to go to London would not leave until about two hours later than Miss Smith's train to the north, and did not start from the same station. What, therefore, I meant to do was to dismiss the coachman, John, and send him home under the impression that I had gone away with my governess, according to the announcement of my plans which I had made to our Castle Manor household. Then, as soon as I had seen Miss Smith safely off, I intended to take my bag in my hand, and proceed on foot to the other station, there to await the departure of the London train.

It would, of course, never do for Miss Smith to

see the carriage, which she imagined was going to take me home again, drive straight away directly that it had deposited us at the station ; so, when we got out, I told John to wait a minute, and then accompanied her to the ticket-office. Some other travellers who had arrived before us were blocking up the entrance, and she had to wait her turn to take her ticket. This delay greatly increased her nervousness, and she began to be in a desperate fidget lest she should be too late. I showed her, by the station-clock overhead, that she had fully ten minutes to spare, but she was too much upset to be calmed by reason. Pulling out her purse she commenced fumbling at it hurriedly, and was dismayed to find that she could not open it. "Oh, Ina!" she exclaimed, helplessly, "what *am* I to do? Something has happened to my purse, and I can't get it open! Dear! dear! I *know* I shall be too late! Can you lend me some money?"

The purse would not open for the very excellent reason that she was tugging at the hinges instead of at the clasp; I doubt whether she would ever have found this out for herself in the condition in which she then was; but I quickly saw what was the matter, and rectified it for her. As soon as I had done so, I said, "By the by, there's a parcel to be called for at a shop in the next street, which

John will have plenty of time to go and fetch whilst I'm waiting to see you off. I forgot to tell him of it before I left the carriage, so I'm just going to send him there. I won't be a minute, and shall be back before you've got your ticket."

The poor woman looked at me with a bewildered air at first, as though she had hardly understood what I said to her, and felt only alarmed at the idea of being left alone in the crowded station. Then, seeming to realise the position of affairs all of a sudden, she answered quickly, "Oh, but I forgot, hadn't you better go and do your shopping at once without waiting for me to start? I'm afraid if the horses were to catch cold or anything, Lady Treastle would be very much vexed; and, perhaps, she might think it was my fault. Not that I want to lose your help, only I shouldn't like to make her angry. If these people in front will only be quick, I *may* still be able to catch the train perhaps!"

"Don't be afraid—you've heaps of time," I returned; "and I'm sure there's no chance of the horses taking cold; besides, they'll be kept moving by going on this errand that I'm going to send them off for. I mean to stay and see the last of you, put you comfortably into your carriage, get you some papers to amuse yourself with on the

journey, and see that you don't forget anything at the last moment."

In her then condition of mental disorganisation on account of her anxiety about her sister, she was really hardly capable of looking after herself. She seemed to be vaguely aware of this, and to regard me as a sort of tower of strength which she could rely upon, and her face brightened perceptibly at the assurance that she would have the benefit of my protecting presence until she was fairly under weigh.

"Thank you, dear Ina," she said, gratefully. "I'm so *much* obliged. I can't tell you how kind and good I think it of you to give yourself so much trouble about me."

"Oh, it's no trouble," I replied, repressing with difficulty an inclination to laugh at the thoroughness with which she was being humbugged. So saying I left her, and hurried away to give John his instructions. Though the situation struck me as being ludicrous, yet I had an uncomfortable sense of being in a false position, and did not feel particularly anxious to listen to her expressions of earnest gratitude. I had, for my own purposes, deliberately thrown her into a state of serious distress caused by what was absolutely false, and I was now staying with her merely because it

suited me to do so, and not at all out of regard to her necessities ; considering all this, it did seem a little strong for me to be posing in the character of her especial friend, and receiving thanks as though I were remaining to see her off out of pure good nature ! Yet, after all, I could not help acting as I had done. I was bound to clear the course for myself somehow or other ; and if the process of being swept aside happened to be unpleasant to any obstacle, why, that was unfortunate for the obstacle, but no reason why the sweeping aside should be given up.

Having told John that he need not wait any longer, I watched him drive away, and then returned to my governess, who was, by that time, again in need of assistance. She had paid for her ticket with a £5 note, and received a considerable amount of change, which she had managed to let slip through her trembling fingers as she was transferring it to her purse, and it had rolled hither and thither on the floor. Firmly convinced that the train was on the very point of starting, she was, when I arrived, just about to hurry off and take her seat, and abandon the money to its fate, though she could but ill have afforded to lose it. Luckily I was in time to stop this folly, and persuaded her to stay and join me in picking up

the scattered coins, which we soon accomplished. Whilst thus employed, I could not help reflecting on how differently she and I were constituted, and on how much the most fit I was to look after myself.

It must be a queer sensation, thought I, to care for any one to such a pitch as she does. Fancy being in such a state of mind as she is at the mere idea of some other person's being ill, or in trouble of some kind or other! Well, I thank my stars I am somewhat tougher than that, and not *quite* such a softy. Precious little chance I should have, else, of shifting for myself, and fighting my own way in the world, as I mean to do!

It was with a sense of pity, wherein (as is often the case) there was a strong admixture of contempt, that I escorted her to the train, found her the right carriage, established her in it with such travelling comforts as were to be had, repeated over and over the names of the places where she would have to change before reaching Carlisle, for fear of her forgetting them, and paid her whatever other little attentions I could think of. She, poor woman, was quite overwhelmed at such thoughtful politeness on my part, and received it with the utmost gratitude, without dreaming for an instant of the desire to make some kind of

amends for the anxiety I had brought upon her, which was the real motive of my unwontedly civil behaviour.

I tried hard to raise her spirits, and when the train began to move I walked beside it for a step or two saying cheerful parting words to her. Faster and faster did the long line of carriages slip along by the platform, and I stood still, watching her wave me a farewell with her tear-besprinkled handkerchief. In a minute more she had passed out of sight, and I felt, that now the last link of my chain was indeed broken, that I had got rid of all the authorities whom I detested, and that I was in very truth my own mistress.

The first thing for me to do now was to make my way to the other station, and there await the starting of my train for London. In order to avoid the risk of being recognised by any one in traversing the town, I had, before leaving home, put into my pocket a thick veil; this I now donned, and then, with my bag in my hand, issued out into the streets. Here I soon had cause to congratulate myself on having taken the precaution to wear a veil, for, on turning a corner, I suddenly found myself confronted by our own carriage, with John on the box, drawn up close to the pavement. John was profiting by the

absence of his master's family to do some shopping on his own account, and also to enjoy the society of a female acquaintance, who was perched up on the seat beside him, displaying manifold and gaudy ribbons from that point of vantage with an air of immense complacency. Though he glanced at me as I passed, he did not recognise me through my thick veil, and I reached my destination in safety, without meeting any one else whom I knew.

The train by which I was going was not due to start for some time to come, and I could not take a ticket for it yet. As I was anxious not to attract observation by being seen hanging about the station, I withdrew into the waiting-room with a book in my hand, and settled myself there quietly, as if to pass the time in reading. I was, in truth, too much excited to fix my attention on my book, but I wished to *appear* to be engrossed in it all the same; and as it is obviously impossible to read much through a thick veil, I threw mine back when I began to pretend to study the volume which I held.

I was undisturbed in my seclusion for a considerable while; but just as I was beginning to think that it was getting near time for the train to start, and that the ticket-office would soon be open, two ladies entered the room, attended by a

footman laden with their rugs, bags, and etceteras. These he deposited on the table and then retired, touching his hat respectfully, and saying that the tickets would not be given out for another five minutes.

The lady nearest me was a middle-aged person. I saw at a glance, as she entered the room, that she was a complete stranger to me, and I looked at her carelessly, without at first noticing her younger companion. I had, for the moment, forgotten that my veil was up; but then, suddenly remembering it, and also the expediency of concealing my face before going to take my ticket, I was just about to lower the odious stifling mass of thick gauze, when the younger lady moved towards the table to take something out of her travelling-bag. She looked at me in passing, and as our eyes met I felt a thrill of alarm, and a conviction that she was some one I had met before, though I could not recollect where or how, or what her name was. Luckily she had evidently no recollection of me, but passed on without a gleam of recognition in her face, got what she wanted out of the bag, and returned to her seat. None the less, I was perfectly certain I knew her, and all at once it flashed across me who she was. She must be Kitty Mervyn, the girl whom I had

met and taken a strong fancy to at Lugano four years ago. Since then we had both of us grown and altered considerably in appearance, and she had developed into a tall, handsome, stately-looking young woman. But it was so uncommon an event for any one to make any great impression on me, that I was not likely to forget whoever had been able to work that miracle, and I felt positive that I could not now be mistaken as to Kitty's identity. I perceived, also, that she had no idea whatever of who I was, which was most fortunate for me, as it would have greatly interfered with my plans to be seen there by any one who knew me. I was quite aware of this, and rejoiced at my good luck; and yet—strange creatures that we are!—even whilst I rejoiced, I suffered a pang of keen mortification. Hardly ever in my life had I felt disposed to honour one of my fellow-creatures with any especial degree of liking or approval; and when, for once, I had been moved to do so, it seemed as if the individual thus distinguished ought certainly to have felt some corresponding amount of inclination for me. Yet this had not been the case, since Kitty Mervyn had forgotten me, though I had not forgotten her. And therefore I had a sense of annoyance and humiliation at this forgetfulness, notwithstanding its opportuneness, and the inconvenience that it

would have been to me to be recognised just then, when it was my great object to leave no trace that could show what had become of me after the time that I had parted from Miss Smith.

As soon as the ticket-office was open, the footman returned to inform the ladies of that fact; then they left the waiting-room attended by the man carrying their *impedimenta* for them as before. Having stayed a minute longer to let them get out of the way, I was on the point of following them, when I noticed a small article lying under the table, and picked it up. It was one of those purses that are purse and pocket-book combined, and I guessed that it had probably fallen out of Miss Mervyn's bag when she had opened it just now to take out something else. What should I do with the purse? I had little doubt of who the rightful owner was, and could easily restore it to her if I chose. Only the question was whether I *did* choose, for there was no one near to see me find it, and I was free to do as I pleased. At some other time I might, perhaps, have followed the dictates of honesty, but at the present moment I was out of charity with Kitty. I had not forgiven her for the wound which she had unconsciously inflicted on my self-esteem, and was much more inclined to spite her, if I had a chance, than

to do her a good turn ; therefore, after hesitating for a few moments, I pocketed what I had found, postponing the examination of its contents to the first opportunity when I should be at leisure and unobserved.

Now that I was going to trust to my own resources for a livelihood, money was a most important object to me, and as I had no intention of wasting it in needless luxury, I contented myself with a humble third-class ticket. Having secured this, I took my seat in the London train, and was, in due course of time, whirled away from Sparkton towards the metropolis, where I meant to seek my fortune. At starting there were two or three other passengers in the carriage with me, but they got out at the first few stations where we stopped, and when I found myself alone I thought I might as well take that opportunity of seeing what Miss Mervyn's purse contained.

I was glad to find in it several pounds in gold and silver. Some extra cash would be extremely handy to me in present circumstances, and would no doubt be far more useful to me than to her, I thought. Then I turned to the pocket-book half of the purse, and began to explore that also. Here there were some postage stamps, a set of directions for some kind of fancy-work that was just then

all the fashion, and a letter addressed to the Hon. Katherine Mervyn—which last was a conclusive proof that my conjecture as to the ownership of the purse was right. I took the liberty of unfolding and reading the letter, which was a heavy bill for gloves and fans. The largeness of the amount caused me a surprise, which was soon changed into envy as I reflected that I, too, might have been in a state to require a similar profusion of these articles, if my step-mother had not unjustly shut me off from the privileges of my age and rank in life. It was strange how the perusal of that bill, and the thought that it had been incurred by a girl no older than myself, irritated me afresh against Lady Treastle, and increased my former sense of being a much injured and aggrieved mortal!

The bill, stamps, and work directions appeared at first sight to comprise the whole contents of the pocket-book; I was about to shut it up under that impression, when I bethought me that I was in want of a new purse, as mine was a good deal worn, and that if Kitty's was in good condition I had better substitute it for my own. This idea made me take up again the one I had found, and look it over carefully. The close inspection revealed an inner pocket underneath the flap of the other,

and ingeniously contrived so as not to attract notice. Within this sly hiding-place was a piece of cardboard wrapped in silver paper, which, on being opened, disclosed the photograph of a very good-looking young man in military uniform. My curiosity was aroused as to who the original might be, and I turned it round and round in hopes of discovering some name or initial; there was, however, nothing of the kind except the name of the photographer to be found, and so my curiosity remained unsatisfied.

Whoever could that young man be? I wondered, and why was he so interesting to Kitty that she carried his picture about with her, done up and concealed with such care? It was not a brother, as I knew that she had none. Was she engaged to be married, and was it the likeness of her future husband? Only in that case the portrait would be more likely to be carried openly than to be thus hidden away in the inmost recess of her purse, as if it were a thing to be ashamed of.

As I mused over it, and over the desire for secrecy that seemed to be conveyed by the place where I had found it, the thought crossed my mind whether it could be some unacknowledged lover, whose addresses were being paid against the wishes of her parents. Yet somehow I could hardly fancy

that to be very probable either. There was a stateliness and haughtiness about her that gave the impression of a person who would be most unlikely ever to condescend to anything so mean and underhand as a clandestine love affair; she would have too much self-respect and sense of dignity. Well! be the young man who he might, I had no clue to his identity or to his connection with her, and it was no use my bothering myself with vain speculations on the subject. At all events, she would have to get a new copy of his photograph, as I had no intention of returning the one that had fallen into my hands. And with that reflection I dismissed the matter from my mind, and applied myself to the more practical consideration of what my immediate future was to be.

CHAPTER VII.

A FEW LONDON PRICES.

I HAVE not, as yet, said anything about what I meant to do on reaching London, and how I intended to support myself; but it must not, therefore, be supposed that I had not carefully considered, and fully made up my mind upon that important matter. Various ways by which a young woman in my position might earn her livelihood had suggested themselves to me; and, after mature deliberation, I had selected the avocations of daily-governess, shop-assistant, or travelling-maid, as being those in which I was most likely to succeed.

This reduced the limits of my choice to three. For awhile I remained uncertain to which of the three I should give the preference, but finally came to the conclusion that the latter was the one for which I was best fitted by my gifts—both natural and acquired. Lack of training would, of course, make it foolish for me to think of under-

taking the place of an ordinary stay-at-home lady's-maid; but that training was by no means so essential for a travelling Abigail. What would be chiefly wanted for such a situation was, a knowledge of languages, a good head, a capacity for looking after luggage, and such abilities as would enable the maid to supply the place of courier whenever necessary; and in all these respects I had little fear of being capable of giving satisfaction to any employer. As far as needle-work was concerned, I could do plain sewing well enough; and though I did not know how to make dresses, yet I anticipated no difficulty on that score, because, as it would evidently be unreasonable to expect a servant to have cultivated both brains and fingers alike, therefore proficiency in an inferior art, like dressmaking, was not to be looked for in a person who had studied the far higher branch of knowledge — languages. And, besides that, people did not generally want to have clothes made when they were on their travels.

There was another part of a lady's-maid's business which was much more likely to be required, and of which, also, I was at present ignorant; and that was hairdressing. But that was a deficiency which could easily be remedied

by some lessons from a good hairdresser ; and the first thing that I meant to do in London was to inquire for an artist of this kind, and become his pupil until I had learnt from him enough of the art to fit me for a maid's place. Of course, paying for the lessons, and finding myself meanwhile in board and lodging, would cost money—and expense was a consideration that was on no account to be overlooked. But I was prepared to practise strict economy ; and, what with the contents of Kitty Mervyn's purse and my own, I had enough to live upon for some weeks at least, and did not doubt that my resources would hold out till I should have learnt sufficient hairdressing for my purpose. Altogether I believed that I should make a capital travelling-maid ; and it was an occupation especially attractive to me, because well adapted to gratify my taste for much change and amusement.

One thing which I did during the journey to London was to effect a considerable change in my appearance. The more I could make myself look unlike what I had been when I left home, the greater would be my security against pursuit, and I did not neglect the opportunity for doing this which was afforded by the solitude of the railway carriage. I had not got the materials for a com-

plete disguise, but a good deal may be done with a different neck-wrap and pair of gloves, and a brush, comb, needle and thread. These things I had stowed away in my bag, and by their aid I soon contrived sufficiently to alter my exterior to make it unlikely that I should be identified as corresponding to any description that might be given of the Gilbertina Trecastle who had seen off her governess at Sparkton Station.

By the time we reached London night had set in. As we steamed slowly into the spacious and brilliantly lit-up terminus, the bustling, animated scene which I beheld gave me a thrill of delight, and a pleasant sense of having undoubtedly got away from the tranquil duck-pond where I had been vegetating, and having entered the rushing stream of life—a stream which tolerates none of the slimy scum and weed that are apt to accumulate on the surface of stagnation, but speedily washes away every vestige of them.

I saw railway officials of various grades hurrying to and fro, and all intent on some business or other. Loud shouts for hansoms and fourwheelers began to echo through the glazed walls of the great station even before the train had stopped. Porters swarmed at the windows of carriages still in motion, jumped on to the steps, opened the

doors, commenced taking out hand-bags, wraps, umbrellas, and similar small articles, reiterated eager exclamations of "Cab, sir? Cab, mum? Any luggage? Where from?" etc., and vied with one another in pressing their services upon all passengers from whom a tip was likely to be expected. Under this head the occupants of third-class carriages were evidently not included, and not one of the offers of assistance that were being lavished so freely in other directions fell to my share, as I emerged from my compartment with the bag that contained all my goods in my hand. It was a neglect, however, which I certainly did not wish altered under the circumstances, as the less notice I attracted, the better was my chance of evading any enquiries that might subsequently be made about me.

It was too late that night to set about hunting for a lodging, but as hotels are usually to be found in close proximity to railway stations, I had no fear of having to go far for a bed. I was not mistaken in this confidence. No sooner had I got into the street than I saw just before me an immense building with the words RAILWAY HOTEL flaring in large coloured letters upon a gas transparency over the door; and underneath this inscription was another, in smaller sized letters,

stating that within this magnificent hotel travellers of all classes were supplied with every comfort and luxury at extremely moderate prices.

Turning my steps thither, I entered through the open doors into a large, softly-carpeted, handsomely-furnished hall, where a porter in a gorgeous livery and sundry waiters were lounging about and talking. To one of these I addressed myself, requesting to be shown a room for the night, and adding that I wished it to be as inexpensive a one as possible. My request was referred to the presiding genius in the hall, who was an elegantly attired young lady, with the most nonchalant expression of countenance that it was ever my fortune to behold. She was deeply engaged in a book ; but on being spoken to she put it down, glanced at a list of rooms, rang a bell, uttered oracularly the single word "18," then resumed her volume, and at once became as deeply absorbed in it again as though her studies had never been interrupted at all.

Meanwhile, one of her satellites conducted me up innumerable stairs to the chamber assigned to me—lowness of price and of situation being in the usual inverse proportions. At last we arrived at No. 18, which proved to be a room small enough to have done duty as a convent cell, and scantily furnished with a table, a chair, a cracked and fly-

spotted little looking-glass, a washing-stand, a tiny chest of drawers, and a short narrow bedstead, whereon was an abominably hard and fusty-smelling mattress.

The charge for one night's occupation of this palatial apartment was 5s., and for that sum one would have supposed that a little civility from the hotel servants might well have been thrown into the bargain, without there being any danger of the visitor's receiving an unfair amount of return for the money spent. Such, however, was by no means the opinion of the waiters and chambermaids, who were at no pains to hide the supreme scorn with which they were inspired by the spectacle of a traveller attempting to combine hotel-life with economy. To their minds the two things evidently were, and ought to be, absolutely incompatible; and I am inclined to think that they deemed it one of the objects for which they had been put into the world, to make that incompatibility as plainly apparent as possible.

Fortunately for me, I was as little affected by their contempt as I was by the indifferent quality of the accommodation provided. Neither the nasty smell of my couch nor its hardness, nor yet the sense of being an object of scorn to a pack of waiters and chambermaids, had power to interfere

with my repose ; for I slept soundly all night, and awoke in the morning as much refreshed as though I had tenanted the most luxurious room imaginable. Observing a tariff of hotel prices hanging up over the washing-stand, I proceeded to read it as soon as I was dressed. From this document I learnt that a single cup of tea or coffee was to be had for 6d. (would that include milk and sugar ? I wondered), and that the cost of a breakfast, consisting of tea or coffee and bread and butter, was 1s. 6d. Not bad that, thought I, for a place which professes to supply every comfort and luxury at extremely moderate prices ! I should rather like to know what is the landlord's idea of *immoderate* ones.

Paying for food at this rate was not exactly consistent with the rigid economy which my circumstances imposed upon me, so I sallied forth to procure breakfast elsewhere. This was not difficult to accomplish, as there was a tidy little restaurant only two doors off, where, for the sum of 6d., I was supplied with coffee, a good-sized roll, and a pat of butter—all of excellent quality. The small round table on which the food was served was destitute of a cloth, but quite clean ; and I ate my meal with as hearty a relish, and enjoyed it every bit as much, as though it had cost 150 per

cent more, and been consumed in the sumptuous coffee-room of the hotel.

The proprietor of the restaurant was an Italian. I was, just then, his sole customer, and, as he did not seem particularly busy, I spoke to him in his own language when I went to the counter to pay for my breakfast, and asked him if he happened to know of any one who gave lessons in hairdressing. The chance of a conversation in his native tongue appeared to please him ; for he became so communicative that I think it would have needed but little encouragement on my part to draw from him, there and then, the whole history of his life. With some difficulty, however, I managed to check his confidences, and to keep him to the point on which I required information.

Did he know any one to teach hairdressing? He must consider a moment. Yes, to be sure ! there was his friend, Monsieur Candot, a French *parrucchière*, who could do hair, make frisettes, plaits, puffs, curls, wigs, everything. He was not *certain* that Monsieur Candot gave lessons ; but thought it highly probable.

Had Monsieur Candot much practice? I asked ; because otherwise he would not suit me, as I wished only to learn of a really high-class and fashionable hairdresser. Then, seeing the Italian's

face clouding over at the idea of my venturing to doubt the superior talent of a man whom he recommended and called his friend, I hastened to smooth down his ruffled feelings by adding that I felt sure he would excuse my asking the question, because—as he well knew—there were wigs and wigs, and the mere fact of making them did not necessarily imply that they were made well; that, in short, if it were permissible to take liberties with Giusti's epigram about bookmaking, one might say—

“Il far' un' parrúcca è meno che niénte,
Se parrúcca fatta non piace la gente.”

This pacified the Italian's rising ire. There could be no possible doubt, he said, of his friend's wonderful talent. Monsieur Candot was a genuine artist, who never executed any work of art that was not first-rate, because, if it fell short of the perfection at which he aimed, he would destroy it unhesitatingly, and make another and more successful one in its place. His merit was appreciated everywhere; he was in request in the very highest circles, and made wigs “*anche per le duchesse.*”

There was no resisting such a recommendation as this, so I procured Monsieur Candot's address, and set off to find him. He resided in a small

street near Edgeware Road, and when I got to his abode I was fortunate enough to find him disengaged, and to be admitted without delay to his presence. I told him I was a maid who was anxious to learn hairdressing, and asked if he gave lessons in that art. He replied in the affirmative, saying also that he was constantly having applications like mine, and that he had no doubt of being able to make an expert *coiffeuse* of me in about a month—however ignorant of the matter I might now be. Was I going to take the lessons on my own account, or was it by the wish of my mistress?

At the time I could not conceive what was the motive of this question; but I subsequently discovered it to be, that his price for lessons given to a maid at her mistress's expense was nearly double what it was when the maid paid for them out of her own pocket. I, in my present state of life, highly approved of this practice; and, as my answer showed me to be entitled to the benefit of the lower rate of payment, our terms were soon arranged, and the interview came to a satisfactory termination.

So far, so good; and now to find myself a cheap habitation not far from Monsieur Candot's residence. After wandering about for some time in the neighbouring streets, I discovered a lodging that

seemed likely to be suitable. The landlady, however—either because a long experience of lodgers had made her distrust them as a body, or else because there was something she objected to in my appearance—did not evince much eagerness to let her room. She hesitated and eyed me doubtfully, demanding what was my name and occupation, and whether I could pay a week in advance—*i.e.* fifteen shillings.

I had already determined that, whenever I should be asked for my name, I would adopt the abbreviation that had been bestowed upon me in my earliest years ; so I replied that I was a lady's-maid called Caroline Jill ; that I had recently left a situation ; and that I did not intend looking out for another until I had had some hairdressing lessons. And, as I spoke, I laid upon the table the rent in advance which she had asked for.

There was nothing at all improbable in my story, and the sight of the money gave her confidence, so she consented to receive me as a lodger. I then bethought me that she would be almost sure to expect a lady's-maid to be accompanied by at least one big box, and that her distrust might very likely be reawakened at sight of the extremely modest amount of luggage which I had to bring ; so I mentioned, casually, that I had left almost all

my goods at home in the country, and had only a very small bag with me, as it was so inconvenient to be moving about with a lot of heavy things. And having thus prepared her mind for the diminutive size of my bag, I set off to fetch it from the hotel.

The hairdressing lessons were not to take place till the evenings, or late in the afternoons, so that I should be idle during the greater part of each day ; and, as I returned to the hotel, I began considering how to employ profitably all the spare time that I should have on my hands. Evidently the thing to suit me would be a temporary engagement as daily-governess, as I should then be adding to my slender stock of money even whilst paying for Candot's instructions. I would endeavour to get such an engagement as soon as possible; and, in order to lose no time about it, I would go straight to the hotel reading-room, where I should be sure to find the day's newspapers, wherein I might perhaps meet with some advertisements that it would be worth my while to answer.

On reaching the hotel, therefore, I turned along a passage over which was a notice to the effect that it led to the reading-room. A waiter outside stared at me with wrathful surprise, as if he thought that the luxuries of that apartment were

unlawful for any one badly off for money, and that it was the height of presumption for so humble a person as myself to attempt to enjoy them. But I knew well that whoever stays at a hotel has a right to profit by its reading-room ; so I walked calmly in, without heeding his indignant looks. Daily and weekly newspapers, journals, and periodicals of various kinds, were spread on the table, and I proceeded diligently to study the advertisements for daily governesses which they contained. It was not every such place which would do for me, as I wanted one situated in London, and where only morning work was required ; therefore I had some difficulty in discovering an advertisement that was at all likely to suit. At last, however, I hit upon a couple in the *Morning Post* that seemed tolerably promising ; and as it was too late to think of going to apply for them on that day, I copied the addresses for use on the morrow, and then left the room.

As I entered the hall on my way upstairs a gentleman who had come to call upon some one staying at the hotel was in the act of leaving his card. It was a strange coincidence that that particular individual should have happened to be there at the very moment when I was passing through ; for I immediately saw that he was the

original of the mysterious photograph which had been put away so snugly in Miss Mervyn's purse, and as to which I had felt inquisitive. Surely now I should be able to gratify my curiosity so far as to find out his name, I thought; and, so thinking, lingered in the hall in hopes of an opportunity for attaining that object.

Not far from the door there were a lot of pigeon-holes for the purpose of receiving any letters and cards that might arrive for visitors at the hotel; and in one of these receptacles the gentleman's card was deposited by the servant to whom he gave it. This afforded me the chance I wanted. Pretending that I thought there might be a letter for me, I went to the pigeon-holes and inspected the bit of pasteboard just placed there, and thus learnt that its owner's name was Edward Norroy, and that he was a captain in the Fusiliers.

Well, that was *something* to have discovered about him, certainly, but not very much; I had never heard the name before, and was still as far off as ever from knowing what he and Kitty had to do with one another, and why she should care to carry his picture about in her pocket. It was no business of mine, of course, as I very well knew. Yet the singular attractiveness which she had for me made me feel more interest in her concerns

than in those of the generality of human-kind. It was strange, too, considering that I had seen her but twice in my life, and was by no means of an impressionable nature, nor yet particularly inquisitive. But that did not prevent me from speculating about her to an extent at which I myself was astonished ; I had an idea that I should like to be able to observe her, and study her character.

Reflecting how queer it was to take so much interest in the affairs of a person with whom I had absolutely nothing to do, and wondering whether it did not show a tendency to reprehensible weak-mindedness, I left the hall, and climbed up to my bedroom. I had very little packing-up to get through, so I was soon ready to depart, and then I rang the bell and asked for my bill.

It might, not unreasonably, have been supposed that the 5s. which was the price of the room I had occupied would have fully paid for all that I had had from the hotel, and left a pretty fair margin for profit as well. Not so, however, was the opinion of the manager ; for a tiny foot-tub and jug of water which I had used to wash myself in on rising were dignified in the bill by the name of "bath ;" and for that, and for "attendance," an extra half-crown was tacked on to my expenses.

I had had quite enough experience of hotel bills to know that "attendance" was an inevitable item on them, and that it was no use grumbling at the charge. Still, I had found the article so unusually conspicuous by its absence in the present instance, that I could not resist the desire I felt to give a little bit of my mind on the subject to the chambermaid who had brought me the bill, and was now waiting for its payment.

"What an odd thing it is," said I, gravely, "that *attendance* and *nothing* should be two words that have precisely the same meaning. Don't you think so?"

I spoke with the utmost seriousness, and I think that she imagined I was going to dispute the bill.

"Do I think what?" she returned, pertly; "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Why," replied I, "if you look at this bill, you will see that *attendance* is charged just as if it were something extra which had really been supplied to me; that is not the case, as you are perfectly well aware, so the natural inference is that the word must mean nothing, you see. Otherwise one would be obliged to suppose that those three syllables had some special privilege attached to them to enable hotelkeepers to rob people openly and with impunity; for there certainly isn't any

other article—such as dinner, wine, drawing-room, etc.—which a visitor can be made to pay for if he hasn't had it. I thought you might have been struck by the "singularity of this circumstance, but probably you are too much accustomed to it to think it odd. Here's the money ; I wish to have the receipt as soon as possible, if you please."

The woman coloured angrily, and looked as if she had an uncivil reply at the tip of her tongue. Just as I finished speaking, however, a bell rang which she was called to go and answer ; so she was compelled to deny herself the pleasure of a retort. She hurried away, muttering something about having no time to waste in listening to all the rubbish that fools found time to talk ; and the receipted bill was presently brought to me by another of the servants.

Taking my little bag in my hand, I descended the stairs and bade adieu to the grand Railway Hotel, without feeling the very slightest inclination ever again to make proof of the accommodation which it offered "at extremely moderate prices" to "travellers of all classes." Yet I myself told lies unhesitatingly whenever I found them convenient ; so what right had I to complain of other people for doing the same ?

CHAPTER VIII.

A STREET INCIDENT.

BEFORE going to bed that night I wished to arrange my plans for the next day, and to make up my mind which of the two daily-governess situations that I had in view I would apply for first. For this purpose I carefully compared the advertisements together to see if either one contained anything that made it seem likely to be preferable to the other. As, however, there did not appear to be a pin's point to choose between them, I left the selection to chance, and settled the question by tossing. The result of this appeal to hazard was to decide me to try first for the place of A. G., who required personal application to be made between noon and two o'clock in the afternoon, at a given address somewhere in the Bayswater district.

It was no use going there before the hour specified, and I did not feel in the humour to settle down to any steady occupation till it was

time to start, so I spent most of the following morning in watching what went on in the street below my window, and making guesses as to the characters and employments of the various passers-by. Amongst these there was one to whom my attention was particularly attracted. This was a little girl of about nine or ten years old, with a basket containing some bunches of common flowers for sale. It was quite early in the morning when first I noticed her, and afterwards I saw her pass my window again and again; for though, at intervals, she made excursions into other neighbouring streets, yet after each of these excursions she returned to the one wherein my lodging was situated. At first she looked tolerably bright and smiling as she ran here and there, making assiduous efforts to dispose of her stock in trade. But she was not in luck's way, and failed to sell a single bunch; and she evidently took this ill-success greatly to heart, for all the smiles and cheerfulness gradually died away from her face, and she looked increasingly sad and melancholy each time that I saw her pass.

Presently a big coarse-looking woman, who was also selling flowers, came into the street. She and the child met, and stopped to talk, just opposite my window; and though I could not hear what

they said, yet their looks and gestures enabled me to make a very fair guess at what they were talking about. The little girl, I could see, was timidly asking some favour which the woman refused. The child, though apparently much in awe of the other, yet seemed to screw up her courage to urge the petition; evidently she desired very much to have it granted, as I could see by the pitifully earnest wistfulness expressed in her countenance, as she looked up with quivering lips, and eyes brimful of tears. Whatever her request was, however, the woman had no mind to grant it; and, seeming to become impatient at the child's persistency, pushed her away roughly and left the street. For a minute or so after her departure the little girl stood sobbing, and looking a picture of disappointment and misery. Then, using the corner of her shawl as a pocket-handkerchief, she dried her eyes, blew her nose, and mournfully resumed her former occupation.

She did not again come in sight of my window, so I saw no more of her till it was time for me to start on my situation-hunting expedition.

I was walking down towards Oxford Street, with my head full of my own affairs, when I heard a shrill, quavering, little voice pipe out close at my elbow: "Flowers, lady! bootifle fresh flowers.

Won't you please buy a bunch?" Looking down, I saw beside me the same little girl whom I had previously been watching. The contents of her basket were still undiminished, and she was sitting wearily on a door-step, but now started up to offer me her wares, and try to induce me to become a customer. Though I could do very well without flowers, yet I liked them, and thought they would be a considerable improvement to my dingy little lodging; besides, I pitied the child for the bad luck she had hitherto had that morning; so altogether I had half a mind to buy of her. But then the warning voice of prudence interfered, saying that I had no money to waste on vanities like flowers, and that the more I departed from my strict rule of denying myself every superfluity, the more irksome it would be to keep to it at all. I thought prudence was perfectly right, so I followed her counsel, and replied to the little flower-seller; "No, thank you; I don't want any."

She, however, was unwilling to take a refusal, and exclaimed; "Oh, but do *please* 'ave some, dear lady. Sith bootifl flowers, they be! Jest one bunch!"

I was not going to offend my inward monitor by disregarding her advice, so I merely shook my head, and walked on.

For a few steps the child trotted beside me, continuing her importunities, but desisted when she found I was not to be moved. I looked back to see what she was doing when I reached the corner of the street, and saw that she had buried her face in her shawl, and was crying bitterly.

I was provoked at such a very unpractical proceeding; and, thinking that at all events a word of good advice would cost me nothing to give, and that perhaps she might be the better for it, I returned to her, and said: "Now, you know, its excessively silly of you to behave like that, and you'd much better dry your eyes. You're just as likely as not to be losing a chance of a customer while you're crying; and you don't want to do that, do you?"

"Oh, *indeed* but I can't 'elp crying," she replied, between her violent sobs; "its cos I'se so 'ungry—so dreffle 'ungry."

"What makes you so hungry?" said I. "Didn't you have enough breakfast?"

"I 'asn't 'ad none at all," she returned. "When mother sent me out this mornin', she said as I shouldn't 'ave no brexshus till I'd got the money for it with these 'ere flowers; and she telled me the same a bit ago, when I met 'er and axed 'er to let me 'ave a penny to buy suthun to eat, cos no

one wouldn't buy none of the flowers, and I was jest starved. She sez as its all my fault for not sellin' of 'em, and that if I wasn't idle, I could get rid of 'em fast enuff. But that's not true, for I'se done my best—indeed I 'as!"

It really did seem a hard case. I knew, from personal observation, that the charge of idleness was undeserved; and it was very unfair to make the poor little thing suffer for a slackness of trade which she could not help. To keep a growing child running about all the morning in the open air without giving it a morsel of food to appease its hunger till nearly twelve o'clock, was a piece of barbarity that quite shocked me. For, however hard I may be by nature, and however apt to drive my own barrow through the world without troubling myself about the toes that happen to be in the way and to get pinched, yet I do not think I have ever been guilty of gratuitous cruelty to either man or beast; indeed, the mere sight of it always fills me with disgust.

The mention of breakfast gave me a sudden bright idea of how to assist the child without laying myself open to the reproaches of prudence. Had I not saved a shilling the day before by breakfasting at the restaurant instead of at the hotel? and was not a penny saved a penny gained?

I had never calculated on being able to begin gaining anything as yet, so that that shilling was an addition to my funds which I had not reckoned upon, and which I was clearly entitled to regard as an extra—a thing that I could throw away or do what I pleased with—an accidental item which need not be entered on my receipts at all, so that prudence had no right to expect to be consulted as to what was done with it. And, feeling quite certain of the soundness of this argument, I did not wait to hear whether prudence took the same view of the matter or not, but instantly presented the coin to the child, recommending her to spend part of it now in getting breakfast, and to reserve the remainder against some future emergency.

The sight and feel of the shilling checked her tears with surprising quickness, and her wan, melancholy, little physiognomy brightened up wonderfully. Holding her basket towards me, she offered either to let me pick out the best flowers for myself, or else to do it for me if I liked ; adding, with a slight hesitation, that perhaps there *might* be one or two old flowers since yesterday that had got mixed among this morning's lot, and if so, she would be more likely to know the fresh ones than I should. The touch of confusion with which this was said, made me suspect that the contents

of her basket were by no means so fresh as she professed them to be, and that she, being well aware of that fact, was moved by an impulse of gratitude to proffer her services as chooser in order that I might not be cheated.

Evidently it would be prudent to accept her offer if I wanted to have anything out of her basket. But that was just what I felt rather doubtful about doing. I had intended the shilling as a free gift, and had had no idea of receiving anything in return ; besides that, it would be a nuisance to have a handful of flowers to carry about with me, and they would probably have begun to fade by the time I got home ; so, altogether, I at first thought I would refuse them. On second thoughts, however, I changed my mind. The flowers would certainly brighten up my room, and I knew that I should like them if I could have them transported there without trouble ; and, after all, it was just as well to have some value for one's money ; and as she took it for granted that I should do so, there would be no disappointment to her in my having them. I said therefore—

“Will you pick me out a couple of good, fresh bunches, take them to a house that is not far off, and leave them there, with a message that Miss

Caroline Jill wishes to have them put in water till she comes back?"

"'Iss, lady," she answered ; "I'll pick you the werry bestest and freshest as I 'as—and thank you kindly for what you've give me. What's the 'ouse as I'm to take 'em to?"

I gave her the address of my lodging, and then we separated ; she disappearing into the nearest baker's shop, and I continuing my way to A. G. My experience of life had not given me enough confidence in human nature to make me think it very likely that a street child was to be relied upon to keep a promise ; and consequently I thought it highly problematical that I should find any flowers awaiting me on my return. But yet I did not the least regret the shilling I had thrown away upon her. It was a satisfaction to think that her hunger was being appeased, at any rate ; indeed, if I had not known that that had been done, I should have exposed myself to the risk of feeling uncomfortable whenever I thought of her ravenous condition all day. So I had evidently acted for my own interest as well as hers.

CHAPTER IX.

A NERVOUS LADY.

ONE of the numerous omnibuses running down Oxford Street deposited me pretty near where I wanted to go; and, after alighting, I had no difficulty in finding some one to direct me to the address I was in search of. This proved, to my surprise, to be a small greengrocer's shop, where one would certainly not expect that there would be any demand for a governess. However, it was unmistakably the address that had been given in the advertisement, so I edged my way in, past the piles of earthy baskets by which the entrance was almost choked, and spoke to the owner of the shop—a jolly-looking, burly, middle-aged man.

“Excuse my troubling you,” said I, politely; “but I’ve called in consequence of an advertisement for a daily governess by A. G. in yesterday’s *Morning Post*. Is this the right place?” And as I spoke it flashed across my mind whether perhaps

the initials in the advertisement represented the words "a greengrocer."

As soon as the man heard the object of my visit, his face twinkled with amusement in a way that seemed to imply there must be some capital joke connected with the affair. "Oh yes, Miss," he answered, "this be the right place, sure enough! P'raps you b'ain't used to greengrocers as rekvires daily-guvnesses vere you comes from—be you now?"

The man looked so perfectly good-tempered that it was impossible to take offence at his enjoyment of the unknown joke, and I laughed as I replied, "No, I can't say that we do often have that happen."

"Ah, well, so I thought," he returned, chuckling. "And that just brings us to the werry pint as 'as to be considered in this 'ere bizness. That is—no offence my askin'—but vere *do* you come from, Miss?"

I told him the address of my lodging.

"'Ealthy districk, Miss, is it?" he enquired.

"Yes, as far as I know," replied I, feeling rather astonished at the question, and reflecting that my assertion was a perfectly safe one, seeing that I knew nothing whatever about the matter.

"Any illness in the 'ouse, Miss?" he continued,

holding up his fingers and checking off on them the name of each successive disease as he enumerated it ; “any fivver, diptheery, coleera, measles, mumps, small-pox, chicking-pox, ’oopin’-corf, nettle-rash—that’s only nine ; there’s a tenth as I was to ax about, I knows ; what the juice was it now ? Oh yes ! the one as is a flower and a colour—yaller-rose—rose-yaller ! Dashed if I can say it right.”

“Is roseola the word you want ?” I suggested.

“*That’s* it, Miss, thanky !” he exclaimed joyfully, but without venturing on a second attempt at pronouncing the word ; “now, be there any of these ’ere as I’ve mentioned at the ’ouse vere you’re livin’ ? or any other infexshus complaint as I ’aven’t mentioned, as p’raps may be some bran new invention of the doctors since the old list was made out ?”

I had never thought of making any inquiries of the kind at my lodging, so I answered “no” boldly. Even if there were any illness, at all events I did not know of it, so my negative was obviously not to be considered as wilfully misleading, whatever the state of sanitary affairs might be. “Werry good,” he returned ; “then if you’ll be so good as go round the corner of the street over the vay, you’ll find yourself in Fairy Avenue, and at No. 114 you’ll find A. G., that’s to say,

Mrs. Green. You see she's mortal afeard of what she calls jurms, and's allers thinking as strange people 's sure to have 'em in their pockets or their clothes, or some-veres about 'em, ready to turn loose on whoever they meets. So when she adwertizes for a guvness or a servant, she mostly axes me to let 'em come 'ere fust, that I may make sure as they don't come from no infexshus place afore they goes to 'er 'ouse. Did you ever 'ear of sitch a ridiklus fancy 'afore in all your born days? It makes me fit to split with larfin sometimes. But there! it ain't but werry little trouble to me, and I don't mind oblidgein' a good customer like 'er, as takes a sight of wedgebuttles and fruits and sitch things. 'I considers 'em pertickler 'olesome artikles of dite,' sez she to me often. 'So do I too, mum,' sez I back to 'er. And good reason vy I *should* inkcourage the notion, 'seein' as she buys 'em all from me!"

Thanking the man for his information, and feeling that I had gained an insight into Mrs. Green's character which might come useful to me in my dealings with her, I proceeded to 114 Fairy Avenue. On ringing the bell and saying that I had come about the governess' situation, I was requested to wait in the hall, whilst the servant went to see if Mrs. Green was disengaged.

It was very evident that that lady took care no one should enter her doors without undergoing some amount of fumigation, as in the middle of the hall there stood a sort of small brazier, wherein some kind of disinfecting compound was smouldering, and sending out light curls of smoke which impregnated the air with a sickly smell. By the odour of this smoke, combined with that of carbolic acid, the whole house was pervaded, as the floors were scrubbed with carbolic soap twice a week regularly, and carbolic acid was freely applied to whatever incoming thing could, by any stretch of imagination, be regarded as a possible medium for the introduction of those "germs of disease" which Mrs. Green held in horror. In the efficacy of any inodorous disinfectant she had no belief at all. How, she would say, could stuff that was not strong enough to be perceptible to the nose be strong enough to be relied on to purify the atmosphere, and affect any germs that might be floating about in it? Don't tell *her* to use a thing like Condyl's fluid, that had not any smell at all! No, give her carbolic acid or chloride of lime, which made difference enough in the air for one's nose to take cognisance of—then there could be no mistake about their presence, and one could feel satisfied.

She did not admit me to her room till she had

sent the servant back to inquire whether I had been to the greengrocer's and been forwarded to her by him. My answer being satisfactory, I was ushered into her sitting-room and invited to take a seat near the door, and a good way off from herself. We then proceeded to talk business, and I found that she wanted a governess to come every morning to instruct and take charge of her little girl of ten years old, and that the amount of knowledge necessary to satisfy her demands was not beyond the limits of my acquirements. Having discovered this much I lost no time in asking what salary she gave, for I did not want her to anticipate this question by asking me how much I expected to receive, as the fact was that I had not an idea of what daily governesses were generally paid, and feared exposing my ignorance. The terms she offered were so far beyond what I had thought likely, that I was delighted, and at once determined not to let slip the situation if I could help it. Consequently I became very anxious to ingratiate myself with her, and looked out for an opportunity of doing so by manifesting sympathy with the dread of infection which I knew to be a weak point of hers. For if people have any specially absurd craze, they are sure to regard an indication of the same mania on the part of another

person as a strong recommendation and reason for thinking well of that person. I had not long to wait for the opportunity I desired, as she said ; “ There is one thing I must tell you, Miss Jill, and that is, that I insist upon every member of my establishment, without exception, conforming to the regulations I make in order to guard against the introduction of infection to the house. Should you be prepared to do this ? ”

“ Most certainly,” I replied ; though in truth I had no intention of troubling my head about the matter more than I had done heretofore—that is to say, not at all. “ I shall be only too glad to do so. For I must confess that on that point I am what some people call quite foolishly nervous.”

“ It is *impossible* to be too nervous about it,” she returned, “ and I am glad to find that you have a proper appreciation of the necessity of a carefulness which is a duty no less to society than to one’s self and one’s family. A fresh case of illness means the setting up of a fresh manufactory of horrible, insidious, deadly germs of disease, which, once set going in the world, cannot be recalled, and can only with difficulty be destroyed. How many deaths might not be caused by germs made in and issuing from this house, if we were to have some infectious illness here ? And if the illness

had been admitted through any negligence of mine, should not I be responsible for all of those deaths?"

"Quite true," answered I, gravely. "I never was struck by that before, but I see how unanswerably correct your reasoning is. How I wish that every one else had an equally sensitive conscience!"

"Yes, it is indeed sad," she replied, sighing, "to see what an amount of culpable carelessness and foolhardiness exists in the world! I do my best to make these things appear in their true light, but it is not often that I can succeed in inspiring my own spirit of prudence into any one else. I assure you that I have even heard of my precautions being laughed at and called ridiculous."

I kept my countenance heroically; and as she paused, as though expecting me to make some remark, I exclaimed, "It seems hardly credible!"

"So one would have thought," she returned sadly, "and especially in the face of the outbreak of scarlet fever which has recently occurred in so many parts of London, and which every one must have read of in the papers. However, to return to business. Will you kindly let me have the address of your last situation? Should the answer to my inquiries there prove satisfactory, I shall be

glad to engage you, as, from what I have seen of you, I have every reason to think you will suit me."

Now, of course, I had foreseen that no one would be likely to engage me without knowing (or supposing themselves to know, which would come to the same thing) something about who I was, and I foresaw also that it might be against me not to be able to give the name of any one who could be inquired of about me, either personally or by letter. To meet this difficulty I had concocted a story which would, I hoped, be accepted as a sufficient explanation of the matter. But I had never dreamt of any one's being so absurdly afraid of infection as Mrs. Green was ; and the discovery of her foible inspired me with the brilliant idea of offering her a personal reference which she would be certain not to avail herself of.

I replied, therefore, that as I had been a little out of sorts I had been living quietly at home for the last six months, in order to regain my health, and that I had been previously teaching in the family of Mr. Thomson—mentioning the name of a clergyman in the east of London whose parish I remembered having read about not long before in a newspaper as being pretty nearly decimated by scarlet fever. This gentleman, I said, had been most kind to me, having not only given me a

written testimonial to character, but also promised that he would at any time write to, or see, any person on my behalf. I only hoped, I put in parenthetically, that he was not overworking himself in the terrible visitation of scarlet fever that had lately come upon his parish ; but he was such an excellent man, and so indefatigable in his labours amongst the poor, that I feared it was but too likely he would sacrifice himself to them. If anything should happen to him I should feel I had lost one of my best friends. But, however busy he might be, I felt sure he would keep his promise, and would certainly find time to answer any inquiries that Mrs. Green might wish to make about me, whether in person or by post.

She, however, would as soon have thought of walking into a blazing furnace as into Mr. Thomson's parish in its then condition, and, as I expected, thought epistolary communication with him was but little less perilous.

"Ahem!" she answered, "I am afraid Mr. Thomson is not a very easy person to refer to just at present, and I do not quite see how it is to be managed. I could not *think* of going to see him, and I am doubtful that it would be prudent to write to him either, especially since he is so devoted to his parishioners, as you say. Men of

that kind are almost invariably careless about proper precautions. Perhaps he would write me an answer when actually in a sick-room; and then imagine how that letter, full of contagion, would be mixed in the post with other letters, impart to them its fatal properties, and thus scatter sickness and, perhaps, death far and wide! No, never will *I* wilfully run the risk of causing disasters in this way, whatever other people may do."

"I have the testimonial he wrote me at the time I discontinued teaching in his family, if you would think that sufficient, madam," I replied, beginning to fumble in my pocket as though in search of the document in question. Of course I had no such thing about me in reality, but I knew that I could easily pretend to have forgotten it, and then write a sham one and send it by post.

She raised her hand hastily to check my producing the paper. "Wait one moment," she cried, looking somewhat uneasy. "How long is it since the testimonial was written?"

"Just six months ago," answered I.

"Was there any fever or infectious illness in the parish at that time?" she inquired.

"Not that I am aware of," I returned.

"Still it might have been there without your knowledge, might it not?" she continued.

I allowed that this was not impossible, but added that I did not believe the district to have been at all unhealthy then.

“What makes me anxious for certainty about this,” she said, “is, that supposing Mr. Thomson had visited some sick person just before writing your testimonial, he would have probably had germs of disease clinging to him ; and those germs, being communicated to the writing-paper, would be lingering there still, and be a source of peril to whoever comes in contact with that piece of paper. Possibly, however, you have taken the precaution of disinfecting it by fumigation, or in some other way ?”

“No, I have not,” I answered ; “I am ashamed to say that I did not think of it—a most reprehensible omission on my part !”

“Ah, well,” she replied, with an air of indulgence, “it was an oversight, no doubt ; but then you are still very young, and one can hardly expect young people to be as thoughtful as old ones. But we will remedy the omission at once. There is some disinfecting powder in that square box on the table beside you. I shall be obliged if you will sprinkle it thoroughly over the paper before giving it me to read.”

I recommenced feeling in my pocket, and then

exclaimed, "Oh how very stupid of me! I made sure that I had brought that testimonial with me, but I must have left it on my table, as I find I have not got it after all. Will you allow me to post it to you as soon as I get home? Should you think it satisfactory, and write me word when you wish me to commence my duties, I will come at whatever time you appoint."

The look of relief that came over her face on hearing that I had not got the testimonial showed me that she regarded it with considerable distrust, and was not greatly desirous of touching it.

"Yes, you can post it to me as you propose," she said; "and I will let you know my decision by letter also. Of course you will disinfect the paper carefully before sending it. I shall be glad if you will take some of this powder for the purpose, as it is a disinfectant on which I can rely thoroughly, and has so strong a smell that if you were to forget to use it, my nose would immediately inform me of that fact, and I should be thus warned against opening the paper. By the by, in the event of my engaging you, should you be likely to continue the engagement for any length of time? or to break it off again shortly? My reason for asking is, that I am most averse to constant changes in my establishment, because

that means constant fresh risk of infection from strangers ; and therefore I prefer not entering into an engagement with any one who likes to be perpetually moving about from place to place."

It will be remembered that my intention was merely to take a governess's place temporarily, to eke out my means till I had learnt hairdressing and could get a travelling-maid's situation. But I really did not see that she had a right to expect me to confide all my private little schemes to her, so I said nothing about this, and only assured her that I had a horror of perpetual changes, and that a permanent situation was exactly what I was hoping to find.

"There is one thing more that I forgot to mention," she continued. "I should object to your making use of an omnibus or tram-car in coming to give my daughter her daily lessons. I consider public conveyances of that kind most unsafe, on account of their liability to contain germs of disease left by some one or other of the great variety of passengers who travel in them."

"I quite agree with you," I answered, "and hardly ever go in one of those conveyances on that account. I should hope to come here on foot as a rule ; and if the weather should make

that impossible, I should take a hansom, as being the least dangerous vehicle available."

I felt I was pretty safe in making this promise, though I meant to come by omnibus all the same. There was not much chance of her inspecting the passengers in the numerous omnibuses running down Oxford Street and the Bayswater Road; and they did not pass up Fairy Avenue, so I should have no choice about walking the last part of my journey. Thus she would see me arrive daily on foot; her mind would be at ease; I should be perfectly free to use the convenient omnibus as much as I chose; and so we should both be happy.

Everything being settled, I took leave of her, and had reached the door of the room to go, when she spoke again. "On the whole, Miss Jill," she said, "I do not think I need trouble you to send me that testimonial. From what I have seen of you, I have very little doubt that we shall suit each other; and I feel satisfied to engage you at once, as the peculiar circumstances of the case render it impossible to hold any communication with the person who is your reference. Can you begin the lessons to-morrow morning at nine o'clock?"

"Certainly, madam," I replied; "you may

depend upon my being here then, and I am much obliged to you."

Who would have thought that a letter six months old could have inspired her with so much fear as to induce her to dispense with every shadow of precaution about ascertaining the character of an individual to whose care she was willing to commit her child?

Marvelling greatly at her folly, and congratulating myself on my success, I returned to my lodging, where I found that the little girl of whom I had bought the flowers, had duly left them for me. It was more than I had expected her to do, certainly; and the only way I could account for such astonishing honesty was by supposing that no one else had wanted to buy them, so that there had been no temptation to her to break her promise and defraud me of my nosegay. But I believe I judged her with too much cynicism; for, long afterwards, she proved that she had been really grateful for the breakfast I had given her, and was anxious to show her gratitude in deeds.

CHAPTER X.

CHANGE OF SITUATION.

I WAS naturally rather curious to know how my family would take the discovery of my flight, and for some time afterwards I used to look in the newspapers with a half-expectation of seeing a paragraph headed "Mysterious disappearance of a young lady;" or else an offer of a reward for information concerning me; or else, perhaps (but this I considered as being merely *possible*, and not at all *likely*), an entreaty to me to return, and all should be forgiven. As nothing of the kind appeared, however, I perceived that my relatives had the good sense to understand the wisdom of washing their dirty clothes at home, and that they did not intend to draw a needless amount of attention to the fact that I had run away from them. It was inevitable that my having done so would be a nine day's wonder and topic of gossip in the immediate neighbourhood of Castle Manor; but it did not follow that our domestic want of harmony

need be proclaimed to all the world and his wife also ; and so the matter was not published in the papers.

Mrs. Green's little girl Fanny, to whom I was engaged to give instruction, was heavy and uninteresting enough to have driven well-nigh distracted any governess who cared about shoving on her pupils, and deriving credit from them ; so it was lucky that I was less energetic and devoted to my work. As it was for only a very brief period that I meant to superintend Fanny's studies, it was perfectly immaterial to me whether she progressed in them or not ; and I did not attempt to teach her anything beyond what was to be got into her head without much trouble—which limitation reduced our educational labours to a surprisingly small compass. Her stupidity did not prevent us from getting on together most harmoniously ; for though I did not do much towards increasing her stock of knowledge, yet I atoned for that deficiency by opening her mind with an amount of general and varied entertainment with which no previous governess had ever provided her. Sometimes I told her any marvellous stories that I knew, adding touches, as I went on, to heighten the interest of whatever parts seemed to astonish her especially. Or else I would say or do something extravagantly

absurd, just as gravely as though it were the most matter-of-fact speech or action possible, and amuse myself by watching the look of absolute bewilderment that would come over her face at first, and speculating on how long an interval would elapse before it would be followed by the succeeding grin which betokened that her slowly-working brain had at last awakened to the fact of there being a joke afoot. By such methods as these I contrived to find amusement for both myself and her, and I have very little doubt that she approved of me highly, and regarded me as being far and away the pleasantest teacher she had ever had to do with.

That portion of my time which was not occupied either in giving or receiving lessons I spent chiefly in attending to the necessities of my wardrobe, loafing about in the parks and streets, and doing whatever sight-seeing was to be had gratuitously. I did not indulge in any amusement costing money, except theatres, to which I allowed myself a few visits as a treat and reward for my self-denial in other respects — theatrical performances being a form of entertainment to which I have always been particularly partial.

Thus three or four weeks passed quickly away, and by the end of that time I had mastered the art of hairdressing sufficiently to enable me to

undertake the duties of a lady's-maid ; for I was far more industrious in the capacity of pupil than in that of teacher, and laboured a great deal more zealously to profit by M. Candot's instructions than I did to make Fanny Green profit by mine. It is wonderful how much easier it is to take trouble when one wishes to secure value for money spent, than it is when the object of one's exertions is merely to give an equivalent for money received !

Having qualified myself for the calling I meant to adopt, the next thing was to take steps to hear of a situation ; and to that end I put an advertisement in the *Times*, *Morning Post*, and *Guardian*, offering C. J.'s services to any lady going abroad who required a thoroughly efficient maid, capable of acting as courier if necessary. This notice bore fruit speedily in the shape of a note addressed to C. J., which I found awaiting me on my return from Mrs. Green's one afternoon, and which ran as follows :—

“ 2000 EATON SQUARE, *Thursday*.

“ Lady Mervyn writes in answer to C. J.'s advertisement, as she wishes to meet with a good travelling-maid. Lady Mervyn will be glad if C. J. will call at her house to-morrow evening at 5.30 *punctually*.”

How strange that my notice should happen to have been seen and answered by Lady Mervyn—a person between whom and myself there was a remote connection, and whom I had met years ago when I was a child! Would it be safe for me to enter her service? or should I be running too great a risk of recognition? No, I did not think I need be afraid. Kitty was the only one of the family who was at all likely to remember me, as I had been much more in her company than in theirs on the occasion of our previous meeting at Lugano. And that she had no recollection of me I had already proved at Sparkton Station; which forgetfulness on her part, by the by, I did not now feel the least bit inclined to resent, having quite got over the little soreness and irritation which it had caused me at the moment.

Yes; I believed I should be as safe from discovery at Lady Mervyn's as anywhere else, and determined that I would take the situation. I was pleased with the idea of being under the same roof as Kitty Mervyn, on account of the opportunities which I should then have of observing this girl, whose character had interested me and excited my curiosity. And then, too, I might reasonably look forward to discovering some explanation of her having chosen to keep Captain Edward Norroy's

photograph hidden away in her purse as she had done. A *carte-de-visite* is ordinarily stuck into an album, and I wanted to know why she should have treated this particular *carte* differently to that of any other acquaintance.

These anticipations were checked by the sudden recollection that I was counting my chickens before they were hatched ; that I had not yet got the place I was looking forward to ; and that perhaps Lady Mervyn might not think fit to engage me after all. When did she say I was to go there ? Looking again at the note I saw that it was dated the day before. Yesterday was Thursday, and to-day Friday, so I must wait upon her ladyship this very same afternoon, and had no time to lose in providing myself with that necessary article—a character.

About two months before there had died a certain Lady Brown, who was rather a well-known person on account of her having lived much abroad and published a large number of books containing her experiences of the Riviera, the Dolomites, the Alps, the Rhine, and other foreign places. Her husband, Sir Bartholomew Brown, had gone to the East since her death, and was supposed to be wandering about somewhere in Persia at the present moment. As, therefore, no reference was possible to either the deceased Lady Brown or her

husband, and as they had been childless, it occurred to me that if I asserted myself to have been her maid up to the time of her death, there was no one to disprove the statement. Accordingly, I indited a character purporting to be written by Sir Bartholomew, wherein it was set forth that Caroline Jill had been for two years in his late wife's service; had only left an account of that lady's death; had given entire satisfaction during the whole time of her service; was a first-rate traveller; and was a trustworthy, sober, steady, exemplary, and in-all-ways-to-be-recommended-maid.

I wasted several sheets of paper over this composition before I could please myself; and when I had succeeded in getting it to my mind I copied it out in a feigned hand—bold, rather scrawling, legible, and masculine-looking. Of course there was a danger of the forgery being detected, if Lady Mervyn should happen to be acquainted with Sir Bartholomew's handwriting. But then it was quite likely that she was *not*; and I would try to find out if she knew him before I produced the character; and, even if the worst came to the worst, the chances were that she would not take the trouble to prosecute me, and I should have just as good a prospect as before of obtaining a situation with some one else.

By the time my preparations were completed it was later than I thought, and as the underlining of the word "punctually" in the note made me think it important not to be late, I started off in such a hurry that I tumbled downstairs and bruised myself unpleasantly. However, I did not stay to doctor my hurts then, but hurried on, and arrived at my destination just as the Eaton Square Church clock was striking half-past five.

It then appeared that my fear of being late had been quite uncalled-for, and that I might have spared myself the bruises which my haste had caused me, for Lady Mervyn had not yet returned from driving. The fact was she had followed the usual plan of fashionable ladies and gentlemen, who, when they make an appointment with an inferior, take care that they themselves shall not be kept waiting, but do not the least object to inflicting that annoyance on the other party. No doubt such people consider that the time of a servant, tradesman, farmer, or poor person is much less valuable than their own, and a thing of so little importance that it may be wasted at pleasure.

On stating the object of my visit, and that Lady Mervyn had directed me to call at that time, I was told to sit down and wait till she came in. It was past 6 o'clock when she returned, and even then

she did not send for me immediately, but delayed doing so till she had leisurely examined the cards that had been left for her whilst she was out, refreshed herself with a cup of tea, and written a couple of notes. Having accomplished these things, she at last gave orders for me to be shown into her presence.

She was about middle height, slightly made, and aristocratic looking. As she was rather short-sighted she wore a *pince-nez*, and this she put up, and coolly stared at me through, as soon as I entered the room. After a prolonged survey she dropped it, but had recourse to it again several times during the interview, always putting it up with an air of having suddenly bethought her of some feature, limb, or other part of me which she had hitherto omitted to study sufficiently, and at which she wanted to have another good look. I must say I thought that she used the *pince-nez* in a manner which would have been considered intolerably rude if it had been directed at any one in her own rank of life; but then she regarded a servant as being a different sort of animal from herself, and would have laughed at the idea of a maid's not liking to be stared at as if she were made of wood or stone, instead of flesh and blood.

She began by inquiring my name and age; to

which I replied that I was called Caroline Jill, and that I was just twenty-two. For, though my real age was eighteen, yet I thought that that seemed rather too young for a person representing herself as having been a lady's-maid for the last two years, and that therefore I had better give myself credit for a few more years than I was actually entitled to.

"Twenty-two!" she repeated; "you don't look your age. I should not have thought you so old as that. How long were you in your last situation? and what was the cause of your leaving?"

"I was there two years, and I only left on account of the lady's death," I replied. "Did your ladyship know the late Lady Brown?"

She shook her head.

"Perhaps your ladyship may have heard of her," I continued; "she was the wife of Sir Bartholomew Brown, and used to write books sometimes?"

"Oh yes; I did not know her, but I know who you mean now," answered Lady Mervyn; "was her's your last place?"

"Yes," I replied, feeling that the ground was safe, and that I might produce my false testimonial. "Ever since her death, two months ago, Sir Bartholomew has been away from England; but, before going, he kindly gave me a character, for

fear of my having any difficulty about getting another situation through there being no one from my last place for me to refer to. Here is what he wrote. He was good enough to tell me, when last I saw him, that he considered me to be the best maid his wife had ever had to travel with, and that I did just as well as a courier."

So saying I handed over my forgery to Lady Mervyn, who perused it carefully, and then returned it to me.

"I always prefer a personal reference if possible," she said; "but perhaps I might consent to dispense with it for once, in an exceptional case like this, where it evidently cannot be had. Certainly Sir Bartholomew speaks of you in very high terms. I do not want you for myself, but for one of my daughters, who is going abroad with my sister, Mrs. Rollin. You would have to attend partly on Mrs. Rollin also; but she will not want much done for her, as she does not care about a maid's assistance in most things. As they do not intend taking a courier, they must have a really efficient travelling-maid, who can see to their luggage, take tickets, and all that sort of thing. I suppose you have had plenty of experience in that way with Lady Brown? Can you talk French and German pretty easily?"

I replied in the affirmative, that I also knew Italian, Spanish, a little Dutch, and a few words of Greek, and that I could keep accounts in some foreign coins.

“En verité, vous ne vous vantez pas mal!” she returned, looking insultingly sceptical as to my accomplishments being as extensive as I claimed them to be. “Voyons d’abord pour le français.” And she then continued the conversation in French, whilst I replied in the same tongue. The question of wages was propounded next. I had no intention of depreciating my value by demanding too little for my services, and I knew that courier-maids were always paid very high, so I said that I should not like to take less than what I had received from Lady Brown, which was £35 and all found. That was very high Lady Mervyn said; still, she would not object to give it to a maid who was really worth it. After a few more questions she observed that my French was satisfactory, at all events; and that, as she was not herself a very good German scholar, she would get her eldest daughter to test my proficiency in that line. Ringing the bell she told the footman, who answered it, to request Miss Mervyn to come to her. When that young lady arrived her mother desired her to find out how I talked German. As

I came triumphantly out of her examination, and also translated accurately an Italian quotation which happened to be in one of the newspapers lying on the table, Lady Mervyn's incredulity as to my accomplishments evidently diminished. I could see that she began to think my pretensions to knowledge were better founded than she had at first supposed them to be, and that she was now inclined to take upon trust the skill in foreign moneys, and in Spanish, Dutch, and Greek, to which I laid claim.

She hesitated, considered and reconsidered, and scrutinised me through the *pince-nez* for some time before she could make up her mind whether to engage me or not, and finally decided to do so. Mrs. Rollin and Miss Mervyn were going abroad in another ten days, she said, and as it would be well for them and me to have a few days at home in which to get used to one another before starting on our travels, she wished me to return to her house and begin my engagement on that day week. This I was quite ready to do, as I had no doubt of quickly getting free from Mrs. Green whenever I chose.

One thing which I had evolved during the conversation with Lady Mervyn was a grievous disappointment to me ; and that was, that I was not

—at all events for a while—to become a member of her own establishment. I had been confidently reckoning on being brought near Kitty ; but it appeared that this was not to be my destiny after all, unless, by some piece of luck, she should chance to be the daughter who was to accompany Mrs. Rollin, and whose especial attendant I was to be. My mind was set at rest on this point before I left Lady Mervyn's room, for, just as I was about to depart, she exclaimed, "Wait a moment ! I forgot that the young lady whom you will wait on may like to see you if she is at home. Perhaps, however, she is not, as she was to dine out early to-night before going to the theatre. Has Kitty started yet, do you know ?" she continued, turning to the daughter who had been experimenting on my German.

"Yes," was the answer ; "she went ten minutes ago, just before I came to you."

"Ah, never mind then, Jill ; you can go now," returned Lady Mervyn. Whereupon I took myself off, mightily pleased at having discovered that the Miss Mervyn whom I was to serve was just the one whom I wanted it to be.

The next thing was to terminate my engagement with Mrs. Green, and I meant to make her do this herself. For this purpose I informed her next

morning that I was sorry to say that I found the daily walk to her house was more than I could manage, therefore I must ask her to permit me to come by omnibus in future.

She replied (as I had felt very sure she would do) that she could not on any account consent to expose herself and her household to such a risk of infection. Could I not change my residence, and come to live nearer her house? I answered that I did not wish to do that, as I was quite comfortable in my lodging, and should probably have a difficulty in finding another to suit me equally well.

She returned that it was most annoying, and that in that case there was no choice but to conclude our connection together. That would necessitate her looking out for another governess, which she greatly disliked doing because there was always *some* danger of infection from strangers coming to the premises, notwithstanding all the precautions she could take. She would never have engaged me if she had thought there was a chance of the engagement lasting so short a time; but I had seemed so anxious for a permanent place that she thought I was as averse to constant changes as she was herself. However, there was no help for it if I declined to change my abode, for it was

out of the question for her to allow any one coming daily to her house to make use of an omnibus.

Poor woman ! I think she would have had a fit if she had known that I had done that very thing day after day since I had been teaching her child ; and she was certainly an excellent illustration of the truth of the old proverb, " Where ignorance is bliss 'tis folly to be wise." Yet I don't think she was very singular in this after all. How many of us are there—especially of those who are heads of houses—whose peace of mind might not be considerably disturbed if we did but know the extent to which other people are in the habit of setting at nought and ignoring some particular pet prejudice of our own ?

It amused me to affect deep sympathy with a piece of folly which I was laughing at in my sleeve all the time ; so I replied that I fully recognised the truth of what she said, and that I was truly grieved to be the means of exposing her to fresh peril from germs of disease clinging to the clothes of applicants for my situation ; but that since *she* objected to my coming by a 'bus, and *I* objected to leave my present lodging, there was unfortunately no option about my ceasing to instruct Fanny.

She sighed, and answered that she was afraid

that was true. At the same time, she could not in justice omit to say that she considered me to have behaved very well in at once telling her honestly of my inability to continue to attend to my duties without travelling by that dangerous conveyance which she had expressly prohibited me from using. She feared there were some people who would have been less straightforward, and who would, in such a case, have slyly disobeyed her, and endeavoured to conceal from her what they were doing. But then no one was likely to be guilty of such unprincipled conduct as that whose views were as sound as she knew mine to be on the subject of infection! Could I go on coming to her house as before for a few days longer? If so she would be very glad, as, perhaps, by then she might be able to hear of a successor for me. But if the walk was too far for me to manage, why, of course, the engagement must come to an end at once, as she could not consent to my coming by omnibus for even one single day.

To this I made answer, with perfect truth, that I should be most happy to go on coming in the same way as I had hitherto done till the following Thursday. After that, however, I could undertake it no longer, and supposed, therefore,

that she would wish our engagement to conclude then.

She assented to this, and we parted on the best of terms with one another.

Perhaps it may be thought odd that I did not pursue the ordinary method of simply giving notice, and taking myself off, when I wanted to go to another situation. Of course I could easily have done so if I had liked ; but in that case I should have lost all the fun that I got out of the matter by the other plan. It amused me to make her act as I chose, and herself dismiss me when I wished her to do so ; and I enjoyed feeling that her weak point rendered her in my hands an unsuspecting puppet, that would kick or not, according to how I chose to pull the strings. Be it remembered that love of fun has always been a much stronger element in my character than amiability.

CHAPTER XI.

AN UNWELCOME ADMIRER.

So now I was going to be a lady's-maid. I knew that the customs, ideas, traditions, and general mode of thought prevailing in the rank of life I was about to enter, would be likely to differ in many ways from those to which I had hitherto been accustomed ; and this knowledge naturally made me rather anxious as to how easy I might find it to adapt myself to my novel position, and to the people with whom I should have to associate. I felt that I was on the brink of a completely new experience, and looked forward with more trepidation than I had expected to my initiation therein on joining Lord Mervyn's household as a servant. Under these circumstances I laid down two rules for my guidance, to which I determined to adhere as far as possible : these were—first, carefully to avoid making enemies amongst my fellow-domestics ; and secondly, to try and discover and conform to whatever unwritten laws of eti-

quette might be generally established amongst them. And in accordance with the second of these rules, I determined that on the day when I was due at 2000 Eaton Square, I would not make my appearance there till towards supper time; for I had often noticed at home that whenever a new servant was coming, he or she was sure not to turn up till as late in the day as possible; and from this I inferred that to arrive early at a new place was probably not considered the right thing.

It was, therefore, quite late in the evening when I drove up to Lord Mervyn's door. The various articles I had had to purchase in order to equip myself properly, had caused my possessions to outgrow the modest little bag that had sufficed to contain them when I came to London a few weeks before; and so I was now accompanied by a box large enough to make a respectable show as it stood on the roof of the cab which brought me.

That cab, by the by, is always a sore recollection to me; for I cannot forget that it was the means, indirectly, of my vanity receiving a sharp blow. The way of it was this.

As I knew that Lady Mervyn would defray my expenses in getting to her house, of course I did not hesitate about coming in a cab; and of course also, in charging the fare to her, I put it down as

being just double what I had really paid. When she came to settle her accounts with me she demurred to this item, saying that the charge was far beyond what it ought to have been for the distance from my lodging to Eaton Square. I replied innocently that I had thought it seemed a good deal, and had said so to the cabman at the time ; but that as he had declared it was not a penny more than he was entitled to, and as I had supposed he must know the proper fare better than I did, I had given him what he asked.

Lady Mervyn accepted the explanation as satisfactory, and passed on to the next item without further question. But, when paying me, she remarked contemptuously that I must be uncommonly silly to let myself be cheated so easily, and that in future she advised me to remember that the word of a London cabman was not *always* to be relied on implicitly.

As if *I* needed any advice of that kind ! Was it possible to hear myself credited with such folly, and yet not refute the insulting accusation instantly ? *I* to be considered such a greenhorn—*I* who prided myself on being anything but soft and easy to take in !

Stung to the quick by her scornful words, my self-esteem would hardly consent to submit to the

affront in silence. It urged me to remind her of the fact that there could, in any case, be no question of my having let *myself* be cheated, since it was not *I* who was the person by whom the fare was eventually to be paid. But such a retort, though gratifying to my injured feelings, would have evidently been to the last degree unbecoming to my position as lady's - maid. Luckily my sense of this sufficed to keep me from answering her as I longed to do, and I managed to listen humbly to the unmerited reproach of gullibility, just as though I acquiesced in the justice of it. But it was only by a desperate effort that I could thus control myself, for I was wounded in a point where I was peculiarly sensitive. The thought of the slur that had been cast on my knowledge of the world and hard-headedness rankled in my breast for long afterwards, irritating me to such an extent that I could not help feeling that my dishonesty in overcharging Lady Mervyn was punished after all, and that I had only come off second best in the affair. For the amount of pecuniary profit I gained by it was absolutely insignificant, and certainly inadequate to counter-balance the mortification which it entailed upon my pride.

The thought of this annoyance has led me away

from the proper course of my narrative. I apologise for the digression, and return to the evening when I and my chattels were deposited by the cab at 2000 Eaton Square.

The dignity of the post I was to fill exonerated me from having to join the common herd who supped in the servants' hall, and gave me standing in the higher and more select society occupying the housekeeper's room. Here we fared most sumptuously, for Lady Mervyn had had a small dinner-party that night, and on these occasions it was customary for the servants to finish up the relics of the feast if they cared to do so. Bearing this in mind, the cook never omitted to make the dishes of a liberal size, or to concoct a sufficient amount of whatever sauce was required for the various *entrées*, puddings, etc., to be able to keep back some of it when they were sent up to the dining-room. By this means it was easy afterwards to renovate most of them for downstairs use, even though the sauce might have been popular with the gentry, and wholly consumed upstairs—at least, as much of it as ever went there. Our meal, therefore, was little inferior to, and almost identical with, that which had been set before the guests overhead. It terminated with some capital ice-pudding and dessert ices, of which there was an

ample supply, in well frozen condition;—this was thanks to the care of the butler, who had helped the ladies and gentlemen with a very sparing hand, and then at once sent the remainder to be preserved for us in the refrigerator.

My companions seemed so well inclined to be civil and to welcome me amongst them, that I began to shake off my nervousness, and to think that I was going to get on swimmingly. It was evidently considered that in the presence of a newcomer like me, the first appropriate topic of conversation to bring forward was the character of our employers; and as every one in the room delivered his or her opinion on the subject with perfect freedom, I soon picked up a good deal of highly interesting information.

Lady Mervyn was described as being “reg’lar out and out worldly, a good bit more of a Turk than you would think from the quiet looks of her; a bit mean, too, and one of those ladies who go poking their noses into a larder to see what’s there pretty near every morning.” I could see that the cook considered the last mentioned custom to be highly objectionable, and an amount of *surveillance* which was both uncalled for and aggravating.

The verdict on the eldest daughter was that

she was "not much to look at, and a bit of a screw, but better tempered than Lady M."

The most popular member of the family was evidently Kitty, who was pronounced to be "'andsome, merry, spirity, and pleasant-spoken to both 'igh and low. For all that, though, you can see that she'll never be satisfied without being first fiddle, or pretty near it, wherever she is, and that in 'er 'art she likes 'igh folk and swells better than them as isn't. She don't show 'er pride on the outside, p'raps, so much as some do; but it's there all the same, and you won't often find an 'ortier young lady, go where you will. She's 'er ma's favourite, she is, and bound to marry a top-sawyer some day—she'd never be 'appy with any one as wasn't."

I took the opportunity of enquiring whether there was supposed to be any particular individual in the wind, and I half expected that in the answer I should hear something about Captain Norroy. This, however, was not the case, nor was his name ever once mentioned during the whole conversation. I evolved that she had plenty of admirers, and was very gracious to them all, just as she was to every one else; but that whenever any of them had been cheated by her amiable manner into the belief that he had a chance of becoming her

husband, he had speedily been undeceived, and learnt, to his cost, that her readiness to be great friends with him was no indication of a disposition to be anything more. The most desirable of her many admirers was, in the opinion of my informants, a certain Lord Clement, who was clearly at her disposal if she chose to have him, but whose affection she showed no signs of reciprocating.

Her obduracy in this matter was quite inexplicable, I was told, he being a rich young earl not more than eight years her senior, of good family and irreproachable character, an excellent match in every respect, and whose wife's rank and position would be high enough to content any reasonable woman. There was no doubt that *her* family approved cordially of his suit, and that *his* relations, also, had no objection to it. One would have thought that any girl would have been glad to get such a husband, and more particularly a girl like her who set store on being a nob. Yet, for some reason or other, she seemed not to know he had any attractions at all to offer, and turned up her nose at him as if she didn't care a straw about such things. Not that she was what you could call uncivil to him,—oh no, it was not her nature to be that to any one,—but she certainly contrived to give him more cold shoulder than en-

couragement. Whether or not he had ever ventured to declare himself to her, in spite of this, was a matter as to which opinions varied. The house-keeper did not believe he *had* proposed ; whereas the butler took a contrary view in consequence of what he had heard from a waiter friend of his who had had opportunities of observing his lordship and Miss Kitty together at several parties. But it was mere conjecture, and every one agreed that there was no certainty about the matter either one way or other.

It can easily be imagined that gossip of this kind was extremely interesting to a person in my position, anxious to learn all I could regarding the lay of the land which I had come to inhabit. The communicativeness of my new associates, and the facility with which I was getting on with them at starting, reassured me greatly. I began to wonder at my former qualms, lest in descending to a lower social grade I should find things to put up with that were distasteful and unpleasant. Entering service was, after all, no such formidable ordeal as I had imagined ; there was nothing that I should not quickly grow accustomed to in my unfamiliar surroundings ; nothing to shock the prejudices or fastidiousness of any reasonable person ; no reason whatever why I should not be able to

fraternise, and make myself at home, just as well in that class of life as in any other. Alas for these *couleur de rose* anticipations of mine ! They were destined to be of but very brief duration, and were soon ruthlessly destroyed by the following most vexatious occurrence.

As there is no accounting for tastes, and as even the ugliest of women need not despair of meeting with some man in whose eyes she will appear beautiful, or nice-looking at the very least, therefore I might obviously have foreseen the possibility of my encountering some male fellow-servant or other who would consider me sufficiently attractive to flirt with. Of course, I ought to have taken this into my calculations when I was contemplating the various chances and events to which I should be liable on entering service. But it was a contingency which, somehow or other, never once occurred to me ; I suppose I was too destitute of vanity about my own charms to think of it.

Now amongst my new companions was Lord Mervyn's valet, Perkins, a pale-faced, sandy-haired, thick-lipped, abominably-scented man, who wore flowing whiskers of inordinate length which he greatly cherished ; who believed himself to be universally acceptable to the weaker sex, and

who was conceited, cowardly, and revengeful. As bad luck would have it, I happened to take his fancy at first sight; and it all of a sudden dawned upon me, to my amazement and dismay, that he was actually making me the object of very marked and unmistakable attentions.

Scandalised at the notion of a man-servant taking the liberty to raise his eyes to a lady, I could hardly trust to the evidence of my own senses at first. But then the matter seemed less unlikely when I remembered that he had not a suspicion of there being any inequality of rank between him and me; and that, as far as that went, I was in his eyes just the same as any other maid in the house.

What he should find to admire in me, who had certainly done nothing to attract him, was beyond my power to imagine; but that did not alter the very unpleasant fact that he *did* regard me with favour, for he made it too plain for there to be a doubt about the matter. I shuddered to think that I must endure being made love to by a valet: it was an odious and degrading idea. Had I realised the possibility of it beforehand, I hardly knew whether I should ever have placed myself where I should be exposed to the risk of anything so disagreeable. Disgusted and angry at the

admiration which I deemed an insult, and was yet powerless to resent, I endeavoured to nip it in the bud by energetic snubbing. Alas! he only thought that I was affecting coyness in order to draw him on, and persisted in his objectionable attentions all the more.

To add to my annoyance, I perceived that I was meanwhile incurring the bitter enmity of Lady Mervyn's maid, Robinson, to whom Perkins had, before my coming, devoted himself chiefly, and who strongly objected to any transfer of his affections. Too much blinded by jealousy to see how unwelcome his vulgar compliments were to me, she attributed the fickle conduct of her swain entirely to my wiles, and thought that I alone was to blame for his deserting her.

Unluckily the man had a smattering of French, and though his accent was as bad as a Corsican's (which is saying a *great* deal), he was immensely proud of his acquirements as a linguist, and aired them on every possible opportunity. Knowing that I, too, was supposed to be accomplished in this line, he kept on addressing me in the one foreign tongue which he believed himself to know, whenever he could recollect enough of it to translate any remark that he wanted to make. By this proceeding the flames of Robinson's wrath

were constantly being fanned higher and higher ; for she—understanding not a word of any language except her own—jumped to the conclusion that whatever French observation he addressed to me must necessarily be something of an extra-tender description, which would be unsuited to the ears of the general public.

I—anxious not to quarrel with her, and recoiling with horror from the idea that any one could possibly suspect me of having the faintest approach to a private understanding with Perkins—invariably answered his speeches in English. But my efforts to undeceive her were in vain, and by the time we retired to bed she had begun to express her hostility in various unmistakable ways—such as darting angry glances in my direction, giving vent to frequent sniffs betokening great mental irritation, and making half-audible observations as to the rudeness of talking secrets in company, and the intense objection she had to meddlesome strangers who intruded and made mischief amongst friends.

A nice kettle of fish this is ! thought I, in reviewing the events of the day before I went to sleep. I certainly do not see how I am to keep to my intention of not making enemies at this rate. And just when I was beginning to feel sure that

everything was going to be so comfortable, too! Why could not that wretch Perkins have let me alone, I wonder? Faugh! The idea of supposing that I could be pleased with what *he* considers pretty speeches. I think it's a great pity that there are any men at all in the world,—or, anyhow, any except gentlemen.

There was something worse than mere pretty speeches in store for me. On the day after my arrival I was going upstairs from dinner when I suddenly saw Perkins coming towards me. No one else was in sight, and he evidently thought it a good opportunity for prosecuting his courtship vigorously.

"Miss Jill, my dear," whispered he, leering at me detestably; "I'm *dying* for a kiss from them sweet lips of yours. Do give me one now—there's no one to see."

I was too much taken aback to be able to think of any answer which would adequately express the intense horror and indignation with which his insolent speech inspired me, so I pretended not to have heard what he said. But I suspect that my face showed something of what I felt, for he was not deceived by my affectation of deafness, and continued, with a conceited snigger, whilst he stroked his beloved whiskers complacently:

“What—not just yet, my little partridge! *Tray biang!* This evening, or to-morrow, then, eh? Only I reelly *can’t* wait long, mind; and if you go on being ’ard-’arted, I shall take that kiss without asking leave. That’s just what you want, I dessay. Bless you! *I* know the way to please the ladies. You’re all the same—longing to be courted and kissed, and yet making believe that you can’t abide nothing of the kind, all the time.”

I reached my room in a state of fury that was mixed with alarm, lest he should attempt to execute his threat. Being stronger than me, there was a chance that he might succeed in spite of all I could do to prevent it. And since it made me frantic merely to *think* of such a humiliation, what should I do supposing the monster actually did manage to profane my face with his lips? Should I kill him on the spot, or should I expire from sheer disgust? How unutterably horrible it was to have to associate with a creature who had such coarse, boorish ideas of what was the proper way for a man to make himself agreeable to a woman! This, verily, was a degradation for which I had not bargained. It was a comfort that I was going abroad so soon; if I could escape for a few days more, I should be out of reach of the danger. And with this reflection I consoled myself as well

as I could, determining to be constantly on my guard as long as I was in that house, lest the dreaded and hateful salute should come upon me unawares, from some obscure corner or lurking-place.

My apprehensions were but too well-founded, as I experienced on the following evening. It was after dark, and I was proceeding along the passage near the pantry, with a lighted candle in my hand, when my enemy suddenly sprung out from some recess where he had been lying in ambush. He endeavoured to throw his arms around me, exclaiming, as he did so: "Now's our time, my pet! I can't *possibly* wait no longer; and no one's looking, so you needn't putend not to like it."

Moved by rage and fright to defend myself at all hazards, I had recourse to the only weapon available; and against the odious face and lips that were approaching mine I thrust the candle that I carried. He tried to avoid the impending peril by blowing out the light; but either he was too much confused, or else I was too quick for him, and he failed to extinguish it. In another instant there was a strong smell of burning hair, and one of his cherished whiskers was on fire. He let go of me with an oath, and an exclamation of pain and fear—for he was a shocking coward; and I

passed on, quivering with excitement, and divided between exultation at my escape and self-hatred for having subjected myself to the disgrace of being thus forced into a sort of romping struggle with a valet.

When next I saw him he bore considerable traces of the contest. The hairy appendages to his face, in which he delighted, were gone; for the whisker I had set on fire had been so much destroyed that it had had to be shaved off, and then of course its companion had been obliged to follow suit. And besides this, there were on his lips and cheek sundry inflamed and angry-looking burns and blisters, which I regarded with vindictive satisfaction.

When the other servants commented on the change in his appearance, and inquired into the cause thereof, he accounted for it by a story—which I did not trouble myself to contradict—about his having had an accident with an unusually explosive match, the head of which had flown off and burnt him. There was nothing so abominably dangerous, he said, with savage emphasis, as an ill-made thing like that, going off all of a sudden, and flaring and skipping about like mad, when it looked as safe and quiet as possible. Regular man traps, he considered them to be; and if he

could have his way, they should be burnt, or got rid of somehow, every one of them.

As he spoke he cast a malignant glance at me, which convinced me that I had incurred his undying resentment, and that in his abuse of the imaginary match he was conveying his opinion about my deserts.

To that, however, I was indifferent ; for in my eyes his hatred was infinitely preferable to his love ; I did not at all suppose he could do me any harm, and only rejoiced to find what a wholesome effect my violence had produced. He could by no means forgive the loss of his whiskers and disfigurement which I had inflicted on him ; and after the encounter above recorded he took no notice of me, except when he thought he saw an opening for saying or doing anything likely to annoy me—of which he always availed himself.

Some of the ways by which he tried to show his spite were highly ludicrous, and all the more so because they failed completely of having the effect he desired. For instance, in helping the vegetables he would omit to supply my wants in the proper order of precedence belonging to my position, and would serve some inferior domestic with potatoes before me. This, as I subsequently learnt, was intended as a mortal offence, which

ought to have wounded my feelings desperately. But I was happily ignorant of it at the time, and had no suspicion of the intended insult. As long as I had enough potatoes, it was all the same to me whether I had them first or last; and when at dinner, he passed over me, and handed the dish to the second housemaid before me, I was all unconscious of the affront that was being offered, so that my peace of mind was in no wise affected by it.

But though, since he had given up making love to me, I was impervious to most of his methods of annoyance, none the less did I find the prevailing state of things uncomfortable in 2000 Eaton Square; and it was with sincere joy that I found myself at last fairly off from London, and accompanying Mrs. Rollin and Kitty to the Continent. I hoped that I had seen the last of Perkins; or that, at all events, if he and I should be destined to inhabit the same house again when I returned from abroad, he would have got over his present bad temper sufficiently to keep the peace with me. Certainly I never suspected the implacable enmity of which—as I was to find by experience—he was capable.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PHOTOGRAPH AGAIN.

WHEN fingers are set to work for the first time at dressing and undressing any one else than their natural owner, they are apt to feel uncommonly as if they were all thumbs ; such, at least, was the conclusion I came to at the outset of my career as lady's-maid. But a very little practice sufficed to make the awkward sensation wear off ; and, after that, I was able easily to fulfil the duties of my post. To these duties I had no dislike, and much preferred being engaged in performing them to spending my time amongst other domestics ; for I could wait on two ladies without shocking my self-respect in any way, whereas I felt ashamed and degraded at the mere idea of being liable to be persecuted by a man like Perkins. I tried hard to conquer this squeamishness, telling myself that it was ridiculous and inconsistent for a woman like me to be so particular, after having deliberately elected to knock about in the world,

and take what came. But my endeavours to reason myself into a sensible view of the matter were in vain, and completely failed to uproot the feeling that to be taken liberties with by a man-servant was a humiliation not to be endured.

The Perkins incident having put me out of charity with the whole class—females and males alike—to which he belonged, it was a satisfaction to me that I was to be the sole attendant accompanying Mrs. Rollin and Kitty Mervyn abroad. This obviated all danger, at all events for the present, of my having to associate with obnoxious comrades. On the score of being dull for want of company I felt no uneasiness, for I knew by experience that I could amuse myself perfectly well when left to my own devices. Besides—had I not now the opportunity which I had desired for observing Kitty Mervyn, and trying to make out her character? I habitually regarded every one with indifference; but she had for me a strange fascination, which was strong enough to overcome that indifference, and I was quite astonished at the extent to which she interested me. Let me enumerate some of the attractions and qualities, both bodily and mental, of this young lady, who was at once my mistress, and also—though she

would have been very greatly surprised to be told so—my connection.

In appearance she was tall, handsome, and imperial-looking, with a bright and open expression of countenance. Her disposition was upright, proud, honourable, and averse to everything mean. In conversation she was clever, quick-witted, lively, and pleasant. And as, furthermore, she was endowed with great social talent and a remarkable knack of pleasing all with whom she came in contact, she won hearts right and left, and was considered charming wherever she went. She was, however, far from faultless. The germ of worldliness, which inevitably creeps into an education amongst fashionable people, had begun to develop itself, and to taint her nature ; and the conclave in her father's housekeeper's room had certainly not erred in attributing to her pride and ambition. So marked was her inclination to haughtiness that, when first I knew her, it sometimes puzzled me why she should take the trouble she did to make herself universally agreeable—even to people for whom she did not care, from whom there was nothing to be gained in return, and who were nobodies in her estimation. As, however, I came to understand her better, I discovered the key to this enigma, and perceived that she was actuated

—whether consciously or only instinctively I do not know—by a strong desire for two things which seemed almost as indispensable to her as the air she breathed. These two things were popularity and power, and without them she was never really happy.

Her frank genial manner was well adapted to make people believe her to be an unreserved, easily-read individual ; but the more attentively I studied her, the less inclined did I feel to think that impression a correct one. I had doubts whether she ever showed much of her real self ; whether there were not recesses, of unsuspected depth, hidden within her where no mortal eye could penetrate ; and whether she did not often make use of unreserve as a mask to conceal its opposite. The possibility of this made her all the more attractive to me. Curiosity as to what might lie beneath the surface she presented to the world, served to increase the drawing towards her that I had always felt ; and had I been so placed as to have a chance of making friends with her, I should certainly have tried to do so. But it was, as I well knew, hopeless to attempt such a thing in my present position ; for she was not the sort of girl to condescend to familiar intercourse with social inferiors, and in her eyes I was simply a maid. Under the circum-

stances, it would obviously be ridiculous if I were to let myself become fond of her, and I resolved firmly not to be guilty of any sentimental folly of the kind. Yet, in spite of this prudent resolution, I must confess that I sometimes had hard work not to yield to the indefinable charm which she had for me; and had she vouchsafed me any special marks of favour, I am afraid I should inevitably have made a fool of myself, and become romantically devoted to her. As, however, I had no particular attraction for her, such as she had for me, that fact contributed greatly to restrain my liking within reasonable limits. To indulge in an unrequited attachment had always seemed to me decidedly weak and contemptible (notwithstanding that such a man as the author of the *Vita Nuova* had done it); and it would have discomposed me immensely to detect in myself any symptoms of being capable of that weakness.

In short, I was sufficiently smitten with Kitty to have cast prudence to the winds, and let my whole heart go out to her, *if* she had held up her finger to me. But that little word "if" made just all the difference. My sense of dignity might safely be reckoned on to assist reason and prudence in fighting against an infatuation for any person who did not care for me in return.

From London we proceeded to Paris ; thence we travelled slowly across France, stopping at various places of interest, and presently reached Cannes, where my two ladies meant to make a stay of a week or so before journeying on into Italy.

So far, I had seen and heard nothing to confirm the gossip about Lord Clement's admiration for Kitty, which had been communicated to me by the servants. But I received ample proof of its truth on the day after our arrival at Cannes ; and this happened in the following manner :—

I was engaged in brushing the dust off a dress which Kitty had been wearing, when I found in the pocket a letter which she had received that morning from England. I did not hesitate to read it. When letters have secrets in them, people do not leave them about, thought I ; so, since Kitty has not troubled to take this one out of her pocket, of course there are no private matters in it, and there is no reason why I should not see if the contents are amusing.

The epistle was from Lady Mervyn, and the portion of it which most interested me ran thus :

“Lord Clement told me last week that he thought he should go yachting to the Riviera at once, and as I have little doubt what is the attraction that takes him there, I daresay you will see

something of him before long. I do hope, dearest Kitty, that you will not set yourself against him, and that you will try and reconsider the answer you gave him before. I am, as you know, the *last* person to try to over-persuade you into a marriage against your own inclinations; but yet I cannot resist putting in a good word for him, for it touches me to see how truly he loves you, and how constant to you he is, in spite of your refusal. Besides that, he really is a man in a thousand, and one to whom any mother would trust her daughter joyfully. Not only has he the recommendations of rank and wealth, but moreover he is unusually amiable, high-minded, conscientious, steady, and superior to the temptations to folly and extravagance to which young men in his position are so peculiarly open. With the exception of yourself, I doubt there being a single girl in London—or in England either—who would not accept him gladly, if only he asked her. And I'm sure one can't wonder at his being so run-after as he is, when one remembers what his money and position are, what immense influence they give him, what an excellent character he bears, and how thoroughly good he is in every way. However, you know already how high he stands in my good graces, and I had better drop the subject for fear of boring you

by going over the same old tale again. Only do remember, my darling, that it is only the earnest wish I have to secure your happiness which makes me so anxious for you not to dismiss him without well considering what you do. Otherwise you may, perhaps, some day find yourself repenting your past decision, and regretting that you were so persistent in rejecting one of the few men of whom it may truly be said, that he is all that a husband should be."

Not badly done, my lady, thought I, as I refolded the letter, and restored it to its place. You knew what a tempting bait power is to Kitty when you put in that bit about the influence which the young man's position gives him. And you understood who you were writing to when you reminded her of his attractiveness to other people—she's likely enough to value goods at the price the rest of the world put upon them. Evidently you, like the servants, are puzzled to account for her indisposition to receive the proposals of this rich, titled, desirable, and altogether delightful suitor. Well! it rather puzzles me too. Can it be that she prefers some one else? No one seems to suspect such a thing; but yet it might be true for all that. What if that photograph I found in her purse were the explanation of the mystery? There is

no impossibility in the idea of a *tendresse* existing between her and Captain Norroy, which they have hitherto managed to conceal from other people. I wish I could see them together, and then I should have some chance of discovering whether this conjecture of mine is right or not.

Whilst speculating thus, a brilliant idea suddenly flashed into my mind. This was, that I might avail myself of the surreptitiously-obtained *carte-de-visite* (which I had carefully preserved), in order to find out what I wanted to know. I would produce it unexpectedly, when there was no chance of Kitty's being particularly on guard, and watch for any signs of emotion that she might show on seeing it.

Wrapped up exactly as it had been when in her purse, and even in the self-same bit of paper, I put it into a blank envelope, which I presented next time I went to wait on her.

"I picked this up on the floor, just outside," said I. "I was going to take it to the landlord; but then I thought perhaps it might be something of yours, as I found it close to the door of your room, so I had better ask you about it first."

The envelope was not fastened, as I had feared that if it were closed she would scruple to open it, which would be fatal to the success of my stratagem.

"Thank you," she answered, taking it from me carelessly. "I don't think it belongs to me, but I can soon see."

I was doing her hair at the time, and commanded an excellent view of her face reflected in the looking-glass opposite which she sat. Her expression of *insouciance* vanished like magic when she had undone the paper and seen what it contained. The colour rushed into her face, which softened for a moment in a way I had never before seen it do; then came a stern, rigid, haughty, resolute look, as though she would defy the whole world to discover whatever secret she chose to conceal.

She did not speak at first, but turned round the photograph again and again, examining both it and the paper in which it had been wrapped.

At last she said: "This certainly is my property; but I can't imagine how it came to be where you found it. I fully believed it to have been lost some time ago."

"Don't you think," I suggested, "that when you thought you had lost it, you had perhaps really only slipped it into your writing-case, or into some book or papers which you haven't happened to open since then until now? Then it fell out without your noticing it, and either you were at that time at the place where I picked it up, or

else some one's dress may have swept it there from your room. It was very near to the door."

"That is *possible*, no doubt," she returned, thoughtfully. "Yet still, I can hardly believe it to have happened so. I felt as positive as one can be about anything, that it was not in an envelope at all, and that I had put it"—she hesitated a moment, and then finished, "somewhere else."

As she did not seem inclined to mention where she really had put it, I thought I had better pretend to suppose that its destination had been a photograph-album.

"It would be very easy to be mistaken about what you had done with it, though," said I. "Probably when it was given you it was in an envelope, and then you were interrupted just as you were going to stick it into your book, and after that you forgot all about it, and it got mislaid."

"Well, you may be right," she replied. "Indeed I don't see any other way of accounting for the matter. But it is odd how I can have been so completely wrong in the impression I had as to what I had done with it."

The theory I had propounded seemed sufficiently plausible to content her, and she did not again allude to the affair. But I had little doubt that

she thought about it a good deal for all that, because of a new look which I noticed in her face occasionally during the next day or two, and which was different from any other that I had seen there hitherto. A gleam of soft light would flash out from her eyes, accompanied by an expression of countenance which was curious, half-ashamed, tender, and wistful, and gave the impression rather of unhappiness than of the joy a girl would be likely to feel when thinking of her lover. This look of sadness would last perhaps for a minute, and then invariably be succeeded by one that was scornful, hard, and impenetrable.

It was beyond me to interpret these signs satisfactorily. That Captain Norroy had power to excite emotions of *some* kind in her breast I felt sure; but whether these emotions were pleasurable or the reverse, I was unable to make out.

CHAPTER XIII.

LORD CLEMENT.

LADY MERVYN'S prediction regarding Lord Clement's movements proved to be correct. His yacht, *La Catalina*, arrived at Cannes two or three days after we did, and that event was speedily followed by the appearance of her noble owner at the hotel where we were staying.

The interest with which Kitty's affairs inspired me had led to my speculating a good deal on the subject of this young lord ; and I had made up my mind that he was almost sure to have something or other disagreeable about him which would counterbalance his many charms, and afford some explanation of her unwillingness to accept him. No doubt, thought I, he is loutish, silly, ugly, untidy, bad mannered, eccentric, or in some other way objectionable. This anticipation, however, turned out to be wrong, and I soon perceived that he had none of the defects with which my lively imagination had credited him.

He was rather below middle height, dressed well and quietly, and could never by any accident be mistaken for anything but a gentleman—which, indeed, he certainly was in every respect. Neither handsome nor ugly, his face was amiable and mild, but possessed no other very marked expression of any kind. One would not suppose him to be powerful or weak, distinguished or insignificant, a genius or a fool. If there was nothing specially attractive about his appearance, neither was there the reverse.

His intellect was not in any way brilliant, but he had good sense and fair average abilities, was eminently painstaking, and would work as laboriously at whatever he thought it his duty to do as though his livelihood had depended on his exertions. In short, I think that the most appropriate description of him is mediocrity, in respect of everything except moral qualities; but where these were concerned he was by no means mediocre, being far more conscientious and anxious to do right than are the majority of rich young men who have the world at their feet.

The most trying thing about him was a tendency to make a fuss about trifles, and to attach a needless importance to all the minor proprieties of life, which was sometimes rather irritating. But, after

all, fidgettiness and extra deference to Mrs. Grundy are only very small defects in the eyes of most people. I could understand that Kitty might occasionally be aggravated by these failings, yet they alone were not, in my opinion, sufficient to account for his being refused by a girl who was ambitious, and who had enough perspicacity and worldly wisdom to appreciate what an excellent match he was, and what an opening for ambition would be afforded by the position of his wife.

I was curious to know how Kitty treated him, and profited by every opportunity I had of watching them together. From these observations I came to the conclusion that he had inspired her neither with affection nor aversion, and that she was struggling to bring herself to accept him. I thought that her reason and judgment were pleading for him, and expatiating on his attractions, as her mother had done, and that she was lending a willing ear to these advocates, and doing all she could to let herself be convinced by their arguments. Yet I had a great idea, too, that the effort went against the grain with her, and that she often could not help keeping him at arm's length, even in spite of her own wish. It was as if she had been conscious of the grasp of an invisible hand, from which she could not wrench herself free, and

which constantly drew her back when she strove to approach nearer to her suitor.

Is it Captain Norroy's hand that restrains her? I asked myself, as I pondered over this result of my observations. Yet, if so, it seems very odd that no one except me should have discovered their attachment for one another. From all that I have seen and heard I should have thought that a young couple in society would never have managed to become spoons to any serious degree without giving rise to some amount of suspicion as to the true state of affairs between them. How ever can these two have contrived to deceive the lynx eyes of gossip-loving servants, and to hoodwink the worldly and wide-awake Lady Mervyn, whose heart is set on securing a brilliant match for her favourite daughter?

Lord Clement's behaviour towards Kitty after his arrival at Cannes seemed to me that of a man who felt himself to be on trial—was nervous lest she should think him over eager in his addresses, and objected to getting himself talked about with a girl who perhaps would not marry him after all. His first proceeding was to get introduced to Mrs. Rollin, who had till then been a stranger to him. The introduction was easily effected, and after that he had no lack of opportunities of meeting the object

of his affections ; for Mrs. Rollin responded cordially to his advances, inviting him to join in all the excursions to neighbouring lions which she and Kitty made, and letting it be apparent that he was most welcome whenever he chose to pay them a visit, and to accompany them anywhere.

I have no doubt that this civility of hers resulted, in the first instance, from something said by Lady Mervyn as to his admiration for Kitty, and the desirability of encouraging him as much as possible. But though this may have been the original motive of the *empressement* with which Mrs. Rollin received him, there was no fear of her not welcoming him for his own sake when once she had made acquaintance with him and discovered what he was like. For she was a person who held that the most important matter in life was to stand well in the world's opinion, and consequently she was quite charmed with his scrupulous regard for *convenances* and extreme horror of doing anything that could shock Mrs. Grundy.

"There's nothing of more consequence," Mrs. Rollin would declare, "than to keep up appearances, because, provided one does that, one is quite safe to be thought perfect. And that's what every one wishes to be thought, or, if they don't, they ought to. I call it quite wicked of any one

to pretend that it doesn't matter what the world's opinion about them is. Depend upon it, that whatever the whole world thinks *can't* be wrong ; and that if a person is generally condemned or praised, there's always some good reason for the blame or the approval."

Keeping up appearances in the eyes of the world was, therefore, her standard of perfection ; and she strove zealously never to fall short of that standard, and always to fulfil its requirements punctiliously. Nevertheless, it would be a mistake to deduce from this that she was such an abject slave of the world's opinion as to let herself be governed by it in things which it did not see. On the contrary, she drew a line between her public and private actions, and did not allow it to interfere at all with the latter. If she had tastes and inclinations to which it objected, she did not, on that account, sacrifice them, if it was possible that they could be indulged in secret. How she would act, under such circumstances, was illustrated by her behaviour regarding French novels. These she preferred to any other kind of reading, and greedily devoured as many as she could lay hold of. But as she knew that the world sometimes thinks fit to frown at an indiscriminate study of these books (who shall say whether that disapprobation is real

or feigned?), therefore she was careful not to reveal her partiality for them. Yet she did not rush to the opposite extreme and disclaim any acquaintance whatsoever with that class of literature. She had no idea of hiding her light under a bushel, and not being duly credited with as many accomplishments as she possessed, and therefore liked to have it known that she understood a foreign language well enough to read and enjoy works written in it. So what she did was, to profess to read French novels solely with the laudable object of keeping up her French; while, at the same time, she was most cautious in talking about them in public, and never betrayed the slightest knowledge of the contents of any that were not fairly decorous and proper.

But *I* knew better than that. It was a matter in which her maid could not be deceived as easily as the rest of the world.

Bohemianism being an open setting-at-defiance of the world's opinion, was quite detestable to her, with all that savoured thereof; and the very correct Lord Clement was, of course, a man after her own heart. There was, however, a wide difference between the respective ways in which he and she regarded Mrs. Grundy. For while the gentleman had a genuine esteem for that great

social authority, and paid her homage in all sincerity, Mrs. Rollin did it only in appearance, and was moved thereto chiefly by fear.

The room in which I slept was immediately over Mrs. Rollin's sitting-room; and by sitting at the open window in my room I could hear—when the weather was calm—most things that were said by people on the balcony beneath. Thus I overheard an interesting conversation as to plans which took place after we had been at Cannes for about as long a time as my two ladies intended to stay there. Where to go next, was the question they were debating. And as Lord Clement happened to call just then, Mrs. Rollin appealed to him to assist them with his advice in the matter.

His manner of complying with this request was eminently characteristic of him. Kitty's society was the object of his keenest desires at that moment, and he was averse to the idea of any movement that would involve his being separated from her. Under these circumstances, and considering the amount of encouragement he had received—especially from the young lady's *chaperone*—some men would have taken it for granted that their companionship was acceptable, and that it was a matter of course for them to accompany the two ladies to their next destination. Not so,

however, would Lord Clement behave. Thus openly to attach himself to them as a travelling companion would inevitably give rise to gossip; and to do anything likely to be talked about as unusual was quite contrary to his ideas of propriety. Though the real object of his visit to the Mediterranean might have been Kitty, yet the ostensible reason had been yachting; and this pretext he had no intention of renouncing by leaving his vessel. In taking part in the discussion as to what our future movements were to be, he gave no indication of being personally interested in the matter in any way, and assumed the air of a strictly impartial adviser. At the same time, however, his opinion as to the desirability of places was in such remarkably exact proportion to their availability from the sea, that I listened with much amusement, and thought that the disinterestedness of his counsels might very fairly be doubted.

Various localities had been suggested and talked over without any determination being arrived at, when Kitty observed, "Now I've quite a new place to propose; and that's Corsica. I saw it looking just like a purple cloud resting on the sea the other day, and I have a great fancy to go and see it close. For one thing, there's no railway

there yet ; and I should like, for once in my life, to feel that I was in a land through which locomotives have never puffed. It would be an absolutely new sensation to me, and one which the present rate of civilisation will soon render unattainable, I expect ; so I vote we experience it while we can. Besides, I'm sure it would be a good place for sketching. What do you say, Aunt Georgina ? Don't you think it'll be pleasant to get away from this cockney old Riviera, and go a little bit out of the regular beaten track where *every one* goes ?”

“Kitty, Kitty !” remonstrated her aunt, “it quite distresses me to hear you talk like that ! You really shouldn't speak contemptuously of the beaten track, and be so anxious to get away from it. Remember that the fact of its being worn by many feet is also a sure proof of its being smoother, pleasanter, and in every way preferable to other tracks.”

“All right, aunty,” laughed Kitty ; “I won't abuse your favourite walk since it vexes you ! But doesn't it strike you that I should appreciate its merits all the more if I were to see with my own eyes—just for once you know—how horrid some other route can be ? And isn't that a good reason for going to Corsica ? *Do* let's go there ; I've quite set my heart on it.”

Kitty rarely failed to get her own way with Mrs. Rollin, who was as susceptible as the rest of the world to the girl's powers of fascination. But the hesitating, reluctant tone in which the elder lady answered, showed me that she had no great fancy for this Corsican visit. "Well, I hardly know what to say," she returned slowly; "to begin with, How does one get there? and in the next place, What's it like when one *is* there? I think I've heard you say you were there once, Lord Clement; do help me to make up my mind about this, and advise me whether or not to do what this rash niece of mine wishes."

Corsica naturally found favour in the young man's eyes as being convenient for yachting purposes. "Oh, if you ask me, I decidedly advise you to go," he replied; "it's really a pretty sort of country, besides being interesting as the birth-place of Napoleon. By the by you should read Boswell's tour if you go. As for getting there, you *could* go by steamer either from Marseilles to Ajaccio, or else from Leghorn or Genoa to Bastia. But I hope that you will allow me the pleasure of taking you over in *La Catalina*, which you'll find far more comfortable than either of the regular steamers—they're all nasty, dirty, uneasy little boats, I believe."

"I'm sure we are greatly obliged to you for so good an offer," answered Mrs. Rollin, "and I think we should gladly avail ourselves of it *if* we were to decide upon going. But I fancy I've heard it said that one can't get anything to eat there—which wouldn't suit me at all. And then, too, there are the dangers from vendettas and banditti to be taken into consideration."

"Oh now, don't go being a perverse aunty, and making difficulties out of nothing!" exclaimed Kitty. "How could the natives exist if there wasn't something to eat? And a vendetta is a strictly private family affair, which doesn't affect strangers one atom. And as for banditti, its not Corsica but Sicily that is full of them; my belief is that you've gone and mixed the two islands together in your head. The Corsicans are always supposed to be a particularly amiable and friendly set of people as far as ever *I* heard. Except, of course, when there's a vendetta to excite them, and that wouldn't matter to outsiders like you and me."

"I assure you that that is true, Mrs. Rollin," added Lord Clement, "and that you have really no cause of apprehension from robbers. The only danger of that kind which I ever heard mentioned during my stay there was from escaped convicts.

Now and then a few manage to get out of the prison, I believe, and support themselves *à la* brigand on the mountains, till they are either retaken or else contrive to get across to Sardinia to join some of the banditti there. But that only happens so very seldom that it really is not worth taking into consideration."

"How about the hotels?" inquired Mrs. Rollin; "are there any good ones to be met with?"

"Oh, they are not at all bad at the two chief seaports—Ajaccio and Bastia," he replied, "and there would not be any necessity for you to sleep anywhere else. I could take you from the one town to the other in my yacht, and from those places you could make inland expeditions within the limits of a day, which would enable you to see a great deal of the country without having to rough it at all. I can't say much for the hotel accommodation anywhere except at the two chief towns, and shouldn't recommend you to go travelling about in the interior. But of course you would not care to visit the more wild and out-of-the-way parts."

"You mustn't be too sure of that," said Kitty, laughing. "Whatever a place may be, it's attractive to me if it's different from any other that I've ever seen before. And Aunt Georgina isn't *quite*

so miserable when beyond reach of luxuries as you might think to hear her talk. I've even known her go without five o'clock tea and yet be happy! For my part I begin to feel an intense desire arising in my breast to hunt up an escaped convict and fraternise with him, or at least to go and inspect his lair. What a novel subject for a sketch it would be! And I'm *sure* that you'll like to do whatever pleases me, aunty, for you always do. Now isn't that true?"

"Well, well, perhaps I do my dear, but only within reasonable limits, please to remember," returned her aunt, who was considerably influenced by Lord Clement's support of the Corsican scheme. "People of my age don't regard 'roughing it' with the same enthusiasm as some of the young ones, who don't really know what that process implies, and for whom it has all the charm of novelty. I should certainly draw the line a long way before the escaped convict you wish to meet. However, joking apart, from what Lord Clement says, there does not seem to be any reason against running over to the island and gratifying your whim to have a peep at it, though I quite agree with him as to its being undesirable to penetrate into any remote and inaccessible parts, where neither pleasure nor advantage are to be gained. I never can

see the good of going to places where no one else goes. There's no one one knows there ; and besides that, as no one knows anything about them, there's no chance of finding them necessary, or even useful, as topics of conversation in society. So that visiting such places is mere waste of time and money in *my* opinion !”

“ Well, then we may consider Corsica to be our next destination anyhow,” said Kitty triumphantly. “ That's the first thing to settle, and there is no need to make up our minds as to anything further just yet. Time enough for that by and by, when we get there.”

After a little more discussion it was decided that we should be conveyed to Ajaccio in *La Catalina* ; which vessel, though not containing berths enough for us to have slept a night on board, was yet quite capable of accommodating us very comfortably for the time requisite to perform the passage between Cannes and Ajaccio. What our plans should be after reaching the island was left quite uncertain ; for though Mrs. Rollin was well inclined to stay only at the two chief towns and move from one to the other in the yacht, as Lord Clement had proposed, yet Kitty was not to be induced to commit herself to any definite approval of this scheme, and without her approval it was

impossible to feel sure of its being carried out, for she generally got her own way about things she cared for. All she would say was, that perhaps it might be a good plan and perhaps not, and that there was not the least need to settle the matter positively yet.

Lord Clement was evidently happy to have had his offer of the yacht accepted—for the voyage across at all events. But I think that his satisfaction was somewhat marred by a dread of Kitty's taking the bit between her teeth when once she should be at Corsica, running away with her aunt all over the island, and getting out of his reach from the sea ; if the whim to do it came to her, there was but small probability that she would not accomplish her purpose.

CHAPTER XIV.

AT AJACCIO.

THE inevitable Mediterranean roll was in less force than usual when we crossed to Corsica, and as we were all pretty fair sailors we had a pleasant passage, notwithstanding the anticipations to the contrary of our especial waiter at the Cannes hotel. He was a brisk, cheery little fellow, with such a power of sympathising with other people that he always identified himself with those guests who were under his particular care, and took their affairs to heart almost as though they were his own. Going to sea and being sea-sick meant precisely the same thing to him; consequently, from the moment he heard of our contemplated trip he became full of compassion for the sufferings we must undergo, and was good-naturedly eager to think of, and suggest, every possible alleviation for the misery which he confidently predicted for us. As we departed from the hotel his final words were to impress upon my two

ladies that, last thing before going to sea, one should always eat a hearty meal, because, “ça-facilite—et sans ça, c’est si fatigante.” I am sorry to have to add, however, that this well-intentioned speech was received in by no means as friendly a spirit as that in which it was offered. For it was quite contrary to Mrs. Rollin’s notions of propriety that one who was a man, and an inferior, should presume publicly to give her advice as to the management of her interior ; so, instead of making the amicable response that was evidently expected, she swept past him with a freezing look and an audible remark to Kitty about the atrocious vulgarity of foreign servants who had never been taught to know their place.

When we arrived at Ajaccio we separated from Lord Clement, he remaining on board *La Catalina*, whilst we proceeded to a hotel. During the voyage Kitty had been more civil to him than usual,—perhaps as a reward for his assistance in persuading her aunt to come to Corsica,—and this favourable humour still continued on reaching *terra firma*. A question hazarded by him as we left the yacht, as to what should be done next day, was replied to by her with a graciousness which made it apparent that his company would be acceptable, if he chose to join her and her aunt in whatever they might be doing.

Accordingly, I was not surprised to see him appear at our hotel first thing next morning. Shortly afterwards they all three sallied forth to see the pictures at the *Collège Fesch*; then they ordered a basket to be packed with provisions, and, the weather being splendid, hired a carriage and drove off for a day's outing beyond Pisciatella. The special object of the two younger people was sketching, to which Kitty was greatly addicted, and for which she had a decided talent. Lord Clement, on the contrary, had no natural gift in that line; but, none the less, he strove laboriously to acquire the art, because he regarded drawing as a highly moral, elevating, correct, and unexceptionable amusement, and therefore one to be cultivated and encouraged as much as possible. As for Mrs. Rollin, she had a French novel in her pocket, and would be perfectly happy to bask in the sun and read whilst her companions sketched or flirted, as might seem good in their own eyes.

My employers being thus disposed of for the day, I was left alone with nothing particular to do. The streets were too filthy to be very inviting, so, being a good walker, I went for a stretch along the road towards the *Isles Sanguinaires*. It was a lovely day, and I thoroughly enjoyed the beauty of the walk, and the contrast between winter,

represented by snow-covered Monte Oro in the distance, and summer, felt in the hot sunshine that warmed me through and through, and sparkled on the brilliant blue sea beside the road. And when I got beyond the limits of the town there were wild hillsides rising on my right, all covered with low bushes of some kind of cistus, which, though now brown and scrubby-looking, would be beautiful, I thought, when in full bloom.

But I must not expatiate on the scenery, as that has nothing to do with my story. What I saw in the course of that walk, to which I now wish particularly to call attention, is this: Near the outskirts of the town I came to a number of small houses standing pretty close together on one side of the road. Each was in the middle of a little plot of ground, which was surrounded either by a wall, or else by strong iron railings; and this enclosure was only to be entered by a gate, whence a short drive led to the door of the house within. Some, but not all, had a family name stuck up at the entrance; and some of the plots of ground were merely turfed over, whilst others were nicely laid out in flower-beds and borders.

One would naturally have concluded these buildings to be villas, if it had not been for the curious fact of their being destitute of windows.

This puzzled me; for I did not suppose that Corsicans could be different from the rest of the world in disliking to live in windowless habitations.

Whilst I was staring at these mysterious houses, and wondering what they were for, a funeral came along the main road, and turned into the gate of the outer enclosure of one of them. This excited my curiosity still more, so I addressed myself to a respectable looking passer-by, and asked him what those little villas were, and to whom they belonged. He replied that they were "*chapelles mortuaires*," or, in other words, private burialplaces, and that each one belonged to a different family. On questioning further, I learnt that these "*chapelles mortuaires*" were by no means peculiar to the neighbourhood of towns, but were found in remote parts of the island also, as the possession of them was quite customary amongst all Corsicans.

I thanked the man for his information, and continued my walk. I thought it seemed a quaint idea to build villa residences for the dead, and then dismissed the subject from my mind. Certainly it never entered my head that I myself was destined before long to make acquaintance with the interior of one.

That evening I discovered that Kitty had a new scheme in her head. What instigated her to

it I cannot say. It may have been the spirit of perversity, or else a guide-book which she had been studying diligently; or else, perhaps, that she was tired of being civil to Lord Clement, and wanted to escape from him for a while. But anyhow, for some reason or other, it had been borne in upon her that it would be the most delightful thing possible to make a fortnight's driving-tour through the island for the purpose of seeing the country and sketching. Knowing that she would probably have a difficulty in getting her aunt to consent to this scheme, she did not intend to propound it until she had first ascertained that it was really feasible, and also found out whatever information might be requisite for its execution.

Her first step, therefore, was to impart the project to me, telling me that she wished me to make inquiries as to various matters connected with it—such as what sort of inns were to be found at the small inland towns; whether the roads were in good condition for travelling on; whether they were likely to be blocked by snow in the mountainous districts; what it would cost to hire a carriage; who was the best jobmaster in Ajaccio, etc.

I was charmed at a plan which harmonised so well with my own love of change and adventure,

and entered into it readily. Being curious to know whether she contemplated being accompanied by Lord Clement or not, I put a fishing question to that effect. "What sized carriage am I to ask about?" said I; "how many must it hold?"

"Why, my aunt and I, and you, *of course*," she answered rather sharply, as if not well pleased at my having entertained a doubt on the subject. "I should have thought you might have known that yourself. We should only take a couple of carpet bags with us, and leave the heavy luggage behind, so as to travel as light as possible; therefore we shouldn't want at all a big carriage. It should be an open one, and have a hood to put up in case of rain."

Oh, thought I, on hearing this, evidently then my lord is meant to be left to himself; his fair weather has not lasted long after all. I suppose that she has been putting a strain on herself to be civil to him, that now comes the reaction, and that she is going to fly off at a tangent from the line of conduct which was dictated by worldly policy, and not by natural inclination. Well, it does not matter to me whether she marries him or not, so I do not want to interfere one way or other; I have only to look on at the play and be amused. I hope she will be able to carry out this driving-tour

scheme anyhow ; for it is just the sort of thing I should like myself.

I lost no time in performing her commission to the best of my ability. Entering into casual conversations with sundry natives—waiters, for instance, a couple of talkative shopkeepers, and the driver of a fiacre who was sunning himself on the steps of his vehicle—I cautiously led up to the topics which I had been told to find out about, knowing that a stranger was more likely to arrive at an honest opinion in this indirect way than by blunt, straightforward inquiries. By means of questions that were apparently purposeless, I elicited a good deal of information as to the relative merits of different hostelries and individuals, which might very likely have been withheld if I had let it be seen that I had any especial reason for wishing to know. Thus I learnt too who was reputed the best *patron des voitures*, and how much would be the probable difference between what he would *ask* and what he would *take* for the hire of a carriage ; this difference being a sum of from 8 to 12 francs a day, according to the opinion he happened to form of the hard-headedness and determination not to be cheated of whoever engaged him.

Having found out as much as I could, I passed

it all on to Kitty, who, armed with this knowledge, took the opportunity of hair-brushing time that same evening to suggest the driving-tour to Mrs. Rollin. That lady at once pronounced the scheme wild and impracticable. On being asked why, she brought forward all the objections she could think of, every one of which was met and answered by Kitty with a readiness that quite staggered her aunt. Mrs. Rollin had been far too much engrossed in one of Zola's novels to notice the attention with which her niece had recently been perusing books of Corsican travel; and the unexpected and intimate acquaintance with the subject suddenly displayed by Kitty almost took away the aunt's breath. Evidently it had never occurred to her that there was a possibility of Kitty's thus making up her mind, and finding out all requisite particulars, without having given a single hint of what she was thinking of. Yet here was the plan, all cut and dried and ready, with every detail gone into.

Certainly the girl made the most of what she had read and heard; and no one, to hear her talk, would have believed that this was her first visit to the island. She discoursed learnedly about where the best scenery was; what towns had good accommodation; what were the names of

the various inns ; and what the cost of living and of the carriage would be. She had got up her subject thoroughly ; had an answer ready for all difficulties that it was possible to suggest ; made everything look *couleur-de-rose* ; and quoted, as a precedent for what she wanted to do, which would have weight with her hearer, the example of an English lady of rank and fashion, who had been travelling about in Corsica a few years before, and of whom she had just happened to hear. Kitty's energy, skill in pleading her cause, and powers of persuasion, were more than her admiring and less strong-willed relative could resist. The scheme, as thus set forth, appeared quite delightful ; Lord Clement was on board his yacht, beyond reach of being taken into consultation ; and so the end of the matter was, that Mrs. Rollin assented to all that Kitty wished, and that I consequently received orders to go out the first thing next morning and arrange for hiring a carriage.

This I accordingly did ; and as I passed through the streets towards the residence of the *patron des voitures*, I met Lord Clement on his way to the hotel, looking just as usual—that is to say, the essence of propriety, clean, well-dressed, placid, gentlemanlike, English, and (to my mind,) uninteresting. I did not dislike him, but his intense

love of respectability and correctness aggravated me; and I thought, maliciously, that his present placid satisfaction would be ruffled by the news of the contemplated expedition, and that I should like to see his face when he heard of it. For it could hardly be expected that a man who had brought the object of his affections to a place where he hoped to be able to be with her daily, would relish the sudden discovery that she was going to leave him in the lurch, and take herself off out of his reach for a fortnight at least, if not longer.

CHAPTER XV.

A DRIVING EXPEDITION IN CORSICA.

MY position as a servant gave me no opportunity of knowing whether or not Lord Clement made any attempt to oppose the projected driving-tour. If he did, however, his interference certainly produced no effect; for the orders I had received were not countermanded, and on the following day we three unprotected females departed from Ajaccio, and set out upon our travels into the interior of the island. Our conveyance was a light open carriage, with a head that could be raised or lowered at pleasure. As the trap only held two people comfortably inside, I sat on the box by the driver; and the very moderate amount of luggage that accompanied us was fastened securely at the back of the vehicle.

It was a beautiful morning, and everything seemed to promise well for our expedition. Driving in an open carriage was a thing which Mrs. Rollin greatly affectioned, and always declared it

to be impossible for her ever to tire of; and as she was rendered additionally complacent by having been able to procure a sufficient stock of French novels to obviate all risk of dulness, she was in a happy and contented frame of mind, which Kitty and I—ourselves in the highest spirits, and ready to make the best of everything—were most anxious she should retain.

The scenery was much admired, especially the lovely views that were to be had, looking back over Ajaccio and the blue waters of its bay. The small, jet-black, silky-looking sheep were noticed and commented on; so were the vineyards which we passed; the chestnut, fig, almond, and olive trees; and, beyond everything, the arbutus bushes, which called forth many exclamations of admiration and delight. No wonder; for it really was a sight to see acres and acres of them growing wild in luxuriant profusion, and covered with magnificent luscious-looking fruit, whose size and brilliancy of colouring far exceeded that of any arbutus berries which I have ever seen elsewhere.

A drive of about three hours brought us to Cauro, where there was some idea that we should sleep that night, if the inn looked inviting; if not, we were to go on to St. Marie Sicché. Corsican inns are generally extremely clean, and the one at

Cauro was no exception to the rule. But alas! it could supply neither milk nor butter, and nothing in the shape of meat except "merles."

I was not at all astonished at this, because I had already been told in Ajaccio that travellers in the island could not rely on finding meat everywhere, and that at the present time of winter butter and milk would certainly be unattainable, except at one or two of the very largest towns. This piece of information had been duly communicated by me to Kitty; but somehow or other it had not reached the ears of her aunt, and that good lady was disagreeably surprised at a scarcity of luxuries for which Kitty and I were quite prepared. She at once voted for not sleeping at Cauro, but going on to St. Marie Sicché, where she had no doubt there would be a better stock of provisions. Of course Kitty and I were not equally sanguine as to this; but we did not tell her that fact, as she would find out the state of affairs quite soon enough for herself, and there was obviously no use in damping her spirits just at the outset of the expedition. Accordingly, we refreshed ourselves with coffee, eggs, bread, and fruit, and then continued our journey as soon as the horses were baited.

In crossing the Col de San Giorgio there were

fine views over the surrounding country which excited Kitty's artistic instincts ; so the carriage was stopped for her to make a sketch, and meanwhile Mrs. Rollin buried herself in one of her beloved novels, and I beguiled the time by talking to the driver, and drawing out his notions as to things in general connected with his country. I found that he was a pleasant, conversational individual, who avowed his mercenariness with unblushing frankness, and laughed at the idea of being expected to entertain any political opinions of his own. "Celui qui donne le pain à un Corse, c'est son père," said he ; "that's one of our proverbs. I'm imperialist, royalist, republican, or anything else, according to who my employer is. Just now I'm whatever pleases your two ladies, as it is they who pay me." Perceiving that he carried pistols, I asked him if he did so because of a vendetta—thinking that in that case it might be a little awkward for us if he should happen to fall in with an enemy whilst he was in our service ; and that it was as well to know what one had to expect. However, the unmistakable sincerity with which he disclaimed anything of the kind put me quite at my ease again. "A vendetta !" he exclaimed ; "no indeed ! neither I nor my family have a quarrel with any living creature. For all that, I never go

unarmed on this sort of expedition because of the *penitenciers*, who manage to get out of prison now and then."

"Poor wretches," said I; "I should have thought that they'd be more afraid of you than you of them. Did they ever do you any harm?"

"No," he answered; "I've never had any trouble with them myself, but they *have* been known to attack carriages, and to be very awkward customers, too; and as I like to be on the safe side, I always take arms with me, as you see."

"Why, one might think these escaped prisoners were regular banditti to hear you talk," I returned, rather scornfully; for I did not believe in there being any real ground for alarm on account of *penitenciers*.

"Well, and so they are," he replied; "there's plenty of room for any number of people to hide amongst the various kinds of bushes—*maquis* as we call them—which grow wild over the hills and large tracts of uninhabited waste land. They form almost impenetrable thickets, where a *penitencier* has little trouble in keeping out of the way; there he lives as best he can, subsisting chiefly on the quails and woodcocks, of which the *maquis* is full, and helping himself to the property of other people whenever he gets a chance. For he is sure to be a *vaurien*."

I shrugged my shoulders, thinking it would be a long while before *I* should take the trouble to carry arms for fear of some Mrs. Harris of a *penitencier*, who probably had no existence save in the imaginations of the timid and the credulous. Our conversation ended there, as Kitty had completed her sketch, and we resumed our course. That evening I told her of the driver's absurd precautions, and found she was as much amused at the idea as I was, and we had a good laugh at the man's excessive prudence. It was, however, a joke which was not imparted to Mrs. Rollin, as she, being somewhat inclined to be nervous, might possibly not have regarded the matter in the same light that we did ; and the knowledge of the driver's thinking it necessary to carry pistols would perhaps have put uncomfortable notions into her head. Of course anything likely to do that was to be avoided most carefully ; as, if she became alarmed or disgusted in any way, she might insist on cutting short the expedition, and returning at once to more civilised places, which would have been a great bore. I was far more afraid of this happening than of any perils from *penitenciers* ; and I eagerly seconded Kitty's efforts to make everything smooth and pleasant, and to keep her aunt contented.

I began to foresee, however, that there would be some difficulty in doing this for long ; and I felt considerable misgivings as to whether Mrs. Rollin would be induced to carry out the driving-tour programme in its entirety. The good humour in which she had started in the morning already showed signs of diminishing. In spite of the cleanliness of the inns, they were a good deal rougher than she liked ; and though at the hostelry at St. Marie Sicché there was fortunately some meat, yet she was again obliged to put up with milkless coffee and butterless bread. It was the latter of these two grievances to which she especially objected.

“Though I like *café au lait* best myself,” she said, “still I don’t so much mind drinking black coffee, because that is quite correct, and a thing that numbers of people do—especially after dinner. But as for dry bread!—why, that’s what paupers in the workhouse have to eat ! I do hope, Kitty, that you won’t mention to our friends at home that we had to put up with such mean food ; I shouldn’t like it to be said that I went travelling in places where the people were so poor or so stingy as not even to afford themselves butter !”

We both did what we could to pacify her ; Kitty by promising inviolable secrecy, and I by making

the landlord rummage out some *confitures*, which, though but indifferent, would at all events save her from the reproach of having had to breakfast on dry bread, whether she liked it or no. This appeased her partially; but still I saw that her wonted serenity was not altogether restored.

Up to this point we had been travelling along the highroad used by the diligences, the *route nationale, royale, or imperiale*, as it is called, according to which party happens to be in power. But we turned off from it next day, on leaving St. Marie Sicché, and took to smaller and inferior roads by which we ascended to higher ground, until we reached the town of Zicavo, perched on the side of a steep hill and surrounded by chestnut trees.

Unluckily the picturesqueness of its situation did not suffice to reconcile Mrs. Rollin to its deficiency of milk and butter, or to the roughness of its inn, and she expressed much astonishment that a town of its importance did not provide better accommodation for travellers. Another thing that was beginning to annoy her was the republican equality and disregard for class distinctions which she found prevailing everywhere, and which were by no means to her taste. The Corsicans, though perfectly civil and well behaved,

were no respecters of rank, and each one seemed to consider himself quite as good as any one else. When the driver came in the evening to ask for his orders for next day, he sat down while talking to the ladies, as a matter of course; and the landlords of the inns took the same liberty in their presence, all of which was much to Mrs. Rollin's disgust. Then, too, she had to do without a private sitting-room, for the inns had only one room that was not a bedroom, and that one was a big public room, which served as sitting-room and dining-room to all classes alike; so that she was obliged either to stay altogether in her sleeping apartment, or else to condescend to sit at the same table with the landlord, his family, the driver, me, and any *commis-voyageur*, shopkeeper, peasant, or other person who might happen to come in. Besides this, the inquisitiveness which is characteristic of Corsicans offended her. She could not bear the freedom with which people whom she considered inferiors would cross-examine herself and Kitty as to their age; whether they were married; if not, why not; what they did with themselves; what relatives they had; where they were going; and similar personal matters. And as I perceived her growing irritation at these various petty annoyances, I became more and more doubtful

whether we should be able to reconcile her to them sufficiently to induce her to put up with them for a whole fortnight.

One of the reasons which had brought us to Zicavo was the fact that it was only five or six kilometers from the baths of Guitera, where there are warm sulphurous springs. Mrs. Rollin, who never willingly lost an opportunity of bathing in mineral waters, was very anxious to see what the Guitera baths were like; and if they proved satisfactory, we should probably remain for a few days at Zicavo, whence she could drive over and have a daily bathe. Accordingly, on the day after we got to Zicavo, she and Kitty went to inspect the bathing establishment at Guitera. However, they found it so wretched looking a little place, and of so uninviting an exterior, that she at once declared nothing would induce her to set foot inside it, and that, as there was nothing to stay for at Zicavo, we had better go on again immediately in hopes of finding better quarters elsewhere. It was decided, therefore, that we should next day proceed across the Serra Scopomeno to St. Lucia di Tallano. We must allow plenty of time for the journey, we were told, as the roads were heavy, and it was not impossible we might be hindered by snow. Consequently my mistresses deter-

mined to get off early in the morning, in order to have the whole day before them. And after giving directions to that effect, Mrs. Rollin secluded herself and Kitty in their own bedrooms, and remained there for the rest of the evening, beyond reach of contamination from the company in the public room.

I, however, was less particular, and sat there till I went to bed, fraternising with the landlord's wife, watching all that went on, and enjoying the opportunity of seeing a little of the manner of life of a foreign race. It was a novel experience, and that is a thing that I always like.

What made it still more interesting was that the landlord was also *maire* of the commune, and as he used the public room as his *bureau* in which to carry on official transactions, I heard all that went on between him and the different people who came to see him on business. He seemed to be a good sort of fellow enough, only with rather an excessive estimate of his own importance and omniscience. Just as one of the visitors was going away, he suddenly bethought him of something that had hitherto slipped his memory, and turned back at the door.

"By the by," said he to the *maire*, "some one said yesterday that they heard there were one or

two escaped *penitenciers* about again somewhere or other. Have you heard anything about it, and do you suppose it's true?"

"True," repeated the *maire*; "of course not! People are always setting about some foolish report in order to have something to talk about, and so pretend that they know more than others! No—I've not heard of it, because it's well known that I make it a rule to pay no attention to absurd tales unsupported by reliable evidence, and that makes the tattlers somewhat shy of bringing their stories to *me*. A pretty state the country would come to if the important officials were to believe all they're told, and go disturbing themselves about every idle rumour!"

I was amused at the *maire's* evident annoyance at some one else's having heard this piece of gossip a whole day sooner than he had. Otherwise I paid no attention to the matter, as I was not in the least degree apprehensive of *penitenciers*. When a danger occurs but rarely, the chances are so great against its occurring to any given person that one is apt to regard it as non-existent.

Before going to bed that night I repeated the orders that had been given to have breakfast, our bill, and the carriage, in readiness for an early start next day, and took care to make sure that

they had been thoroughly understood. Consequently I was provoked to find, when I left my room in the morning, that the whole household had overslept itself, and there was no sign of preparation for our departure.

It was not to be endured that I should incur the stigma of being a neglectful or incompetent travelling maid — I, who prided myself on my talents as a courier! so I instantly set to work to arouse the establishment from its sloth. Hunting about till I discovered where a servant slept, I dragged her forcibly out of bed, and set her to light the kitchen fire and prepare food. Then I woke the driver, and insisted on his beginning at once to get ready the horses and carriage. In short, I flew hither and thither, helping, hustling, and exclaiming “*Dépêche!*” with such vigour that I managed fairly to startle the leisurely Corsicans into a little activity, and to procure breakfast for the two ladies, and get under weigh only half an hour later than had been originally intended. The poor driver was quite alarmed at my unexpected display of energy; he did not even venture to wait to break his fast before starting, but hastily crammed some food into his pocket for consumption on the road. I am sure it was a relief to him to find that my severity relaxed when once

we were off, and that in order for him to eat his breakfast in comfort, I was even willing to take the reins and drive, as I sat beside him on the box.

The weather was still propitious. Enough snow had fallen in the night to whiten the tops of the hills surrounding Zicavo, but now the sun was shining, and warming the keen, delicious mountain air as we drove down the valley.

We had not gone far before we met a funeral, which was so perfectly simple, matter-of-fact, and devoid of anything ostentatious or needless, that I thought it a model worthy of imitation in less primitive places. Two mules drew a rough cart, in which lay the corpse, uncoffined, and covered over with a gaudy-coloured shawl, which allowed the outlines of the human form beneath to be plainly visible. After the cart walked a dozen or so of people, betraying no emotion, but looking serious and stolid. No vestige of black was to be seen. They were dressed in their ordinary everyday garments, carrying the bright-hued umbrellas which are popular in the island, and the men having the customary wine-gourds slung round their bodies. About the whole thing there was an absence of fuss, ceremony, and demonstrativeness, combined with perfect gravity and propriety of demeanour, which made me wish that all arrangers

of funerals would come and take a lesson at Zicavo.

The only stop we made during the morning was at a tiny little village, where we waited a few minutes for the horses to be watered. Whilst this was done, the two ladies and I did not get out of the carriage, but sat where we were, drawn up outside a miserable tumble-down sort of hovel that did duty as an inn. The loungers of the hamlet soon gathered round to stare at us, and were joined by two men who issued from the house. They both had guns, as I saw ; but there was nothing in the least remarkable about that, because a Corsican almost always carries a gun *or* an umbrella, and sometimes both, so that their being armed did not at all astonish me. Nor did I think it in any way peculiar when I heard them ask our driver who we were, and where we were going. For I had by this time seen enough of Corsican inquisitiveness to regard such inquiries as a mere matter of course, and demonstrations of curiosity seemed to me more natural than their absence.

The two men left the inn almost immediately after their questions had been answered. I saw them leave the village, and a little way farther on I caught a glimpse of them again turning off the road, and plunging into the thick bushes on either

side. I concluded that they were a couple of "chasseurs," such as one sees perpetually in Corsica, and then thought no more about them.

Our course at this period of the journey was very tortuous and indirect, in consequence of numerous narrow valleys which were too steep for anything on wheels to cross in a straight line. Therefore the road often had to go round for miles, in order to get from one side to another of a valley which was, perhaps, not a mile broad ; and the distance from point to point that had to be traversed by whoever kept to the road was generally many times more than it would have been to the proverbial crow. Hence it evidently followed that a pedestrian, climbing straight up and down the precipitous hillsides would be able to get over the ground as quickly as a carriage could do. And if this is borne in mind, it will assist the reader in comprehending the events which I have now to relate.

CHAPTER XVI.

ESCAPED PENITENCIERS.

THE horses were to be taken out of the carriage to have a thorough rest, once in the course of the day, so we halted for that purpose between twelve and one o'clock. We were then exactly at the head of one of the long narrow valleys I have already mentioned. It was a wild desolate spot, where not a habitation was to be seen, nor any human being except ourselves. The view before us consisted of the sky overhead, and of two steep hillsides—at some places appearing to be barely a gunshot apart—which converged from the entrance of the valley to the point where we were. These were clothed from top to bottom with a dense mass of trees and *maquis*, whose sombre green tints, were only broken by a sharply-cut, thin, yellowish line, which marked, on one hand, the road we had just traversed, and, on the other, that by which we should presently continue the journey. The sun had quite sufficient power to make shade accept-

able, so we seated ourselves under an *ilex* by the side of a clear bubbling spring of water, and ate the lunch that we had brought with us from Zicavo.

We were not long over the meal, and as soon as it was finished the driver was asked when he would be ready to resume the journey. He answered that the horses ought to have more than an hour longer of rest, and that then they would go on quite fresh to the end of the day. On hearing this Mrs. Rollin sent me to the carriage to fetch a couple of cushions, with which she established herself comfortably on the ground, and then opened one of Xavier de Montepin's novels. Meanwhile Kitty had got out her drawing materials.

"I think that I'll walk on, and see if I can't find a sketch somewhere," she said. "As there's only one road, I can't possibly lose my way; then you can pick me up when you overtake me in the carriage." But her aunt was not prepared to assent readily to this proposal.

"Oh, you'd better not go on all by yourself, my dear," she said uneasily. "Do try and find something to draw near here—a cloud or a tree, or a bit of the road, or something. It's not the thing for a girl of your age to be seen walking about the roads alone, you know."

"I don't think that need trouble us in these

solitudes," answered Kitty laughing. "There's nothing except kites and crows to see what I do, and I don't imagine that *they* will be much shocked at my proceedings."

"Don't you be too sure of there being only kites and crows," returned Mrs. Rollin; "people often turn up so unexpectedly! There *might* be some acquaintance of ours travelling here now; and if so, he or she would be sure to meet us just when we didn't want to be met, and then go home and say that I let you go about alone just as you pleased, and that I took no care whatever of you! Besides, supposing your sketching were to take you off the road, perhaps we should not see where you were, and go past without knowing it. I should be in such a fidget for fear of that happening, that I know I shouldn't enjoy the drive *a bit* till I had you all safe with me again."

"You needn't be uneasy on that score," said Kitty, looking at her watch; "the jingling of the horses' bells could hardly fail to inform me of your approach; but I won't trust only to that. I'll keep an eye on the time, and as I can reckon certainly on your not leaving here for another hour, I can calculate when to return to the road if I *should* turn off it anywhere. I assure you I haven't the least intention of doing anything so silly as to

let myself be left behind, so you can drive along with a perfectly tranquil mind, and an absolute certainty that I am somewhere on ahead, until you see me waiting for you."

Here I took the liberty of joining in their conversation. Having been sitting still and cramped up on the box for some time, I felt much disposed to stretch my legs ; so I said,

"I shall be very glad to accompany Miss Mervyn if she has no objection. Then I could stay on the road near where she is, if she happens to leave it ; and that would make it quite impossible for the carriage to go past her by mistake."

"Of *course*, that's the way to manage it," exclaimed Mrs. Rollin ; "how stupid of me not to have thought of it at first ! Yes, Kitty—you take Jill with you ; it will look so much better than for you to be wandering on by yourself ; and then my mind will be quite easy about not passing you by accident."

"Very well," returned Kitty ; "I'm afraid it'll be rather dull for her dawdling about at my heels—only I daresay it won't be very lively to stay here with nothing to do either ; so she may as well come. We'll start at once, Jill, please ; for I want to have as much time as possible for sketching before the carriage overtakes us."

Accordingly she and I walked off briskly along the road which led towards our destination, leaving Mrs. Rollin, the driver, and carriage, to follow in course of time when the horses should be sufficiently refreshed. We must have tramped, I should think, about two miles before Kitty came to a place which inspired her with a desire to make a sketch. Of course the next thing to be done was to discover the most satisfactory point of view from which the sketch was to be taken. After a little reconnoitring she found a spot that was to her mind. It was a short distance below the road, and in order to get to it we had to scramble down through a mass of arbutus, and of an immense kind of heath, growing taller than our heads—which two shrubs constituted the chief part of the scrub (or *maquis*) at that place.

Having accompanied Kitty to the spot she had selected, and seen her comfortably settled down to her drawing, I looked at my watch. This showed me that there was still a long while to elapse before the carriage would be in motion again, and that, therefore, there was no need for me to be in a hurry about getting back to the road yet. Watching Kitty sketch was not particularly amusing, so I left her and wandered off through the bushes. About fifty yards from where she was I came to

a bit of broken rocky ground, somewhat resembling a tiny quarry, and completely overgrown by arbutus. Here I tucked myself away snugly into a corner under one of these bushes, and lay lazily contemplating its splendid red and yellow berries, which were as big as good-sized plums. They looked most delicious; and as I knew the arbutus is not poisonous, I gathered a berry to ascertain whether the taste at all corresponded to the appearance; I was disappointed to find, however, that this was not the case, as the flavour, though rather sweet, was insipid, watery, and vapid.

My curiosity respecting arbutus fruit being thus satisfied, and I having nothing particular to do, I next began amusing myself by endeavouring to work out a rule-of-three sum in my head. But before my calculations had advanced far they were interrupted by a crackling rustling noise that issued from the bushes growing above, between me and the road. It sounded as if some heavy body were making its way through them; and the noise approached nearer and nearer, till it reached quite close to the recess in which I was ensconced. Then the crackling ceased, and I heard a male voice speaking in low and cautious tones. A bit of rock, on which grew the bush under which I was seated, intervened between me and

the speaker, so that I could not see him; but he was near enough for every one of his words to be distinctly audible to me. He spoke in Italian—that being the language which the people of the country almost always use amongst themselves when they do not talk Corsican, though French is the official tongue, and the one generally employed in communications with foreigners.

“But where are they, César?” said the voice, with a somewhat impatient accent. “You say that from the top of the hill you plainly saw two of them who left the carriage to repose itself, and went on alone. Is it not droll how those English always desire to walk? In that case they ought to be somewhere about here now, yet we have looked both up and down the road, and they are not there. What then has become of them? May be that they have turned and gone back again.”

“*Diavolo!* that would be too provoking,” answered César. “It was unlucky that I lost sight of them as I descended the hill, but it could not possibly be helped, for the bushes were too thick to see through.”

“Well, there is sure to be fine spoil to be had out of these rich English,” said the first speaker, “and we must try to get hold of it somehow. If

we fail to find these two by themselves, I suppose we must do what we thought of at first—manage to upset the carriage at that sharp corner of the road further on, and attack when all is in confusion.”

“But what if the carriage should not upset after all?” objected César; “or what if the driver should carry arms and show fight? Then perhaps we should be wounded, captured, and shut up again in prison. Bah! I hate that prison! Have we not been used like dogs there, and compelled to beat the *maquis* near Chiavari for *sangliers*, when some English milord wanted a *chasse*? And is it not an altogether detestable place? Truly I have no fancy to go there again, and I much prefer this second plan to the first one that we thought of. We shall have no danger to fear in dealing with only two women. Let us on no account be foolhardy, Napoleon.”

“Certainly not,” answered Napoleon; “I have no more wish than you have either to go back to prison or to encounter needless peril! Still, it will be a pity if we cannot secure the golden prize that destiny throws in our way. Those two *must* be somewhere not far off at this very moment, unless by bad luck they should have turned back just after you first saw them. Do you think they

can have gone off from the road?" "It is possible," returned César; "anyhow, it is too soon yet to despair of finding them. Do you, Napoleon, go and watch on the road, whilst I search the *maquis* on each side, first below and then above. Whichever of us discovers them can summon the other by a whistle."

"Good," replied Napoleon. And with that the two men separated and went off in different directions, as I knew by the rustling of the bushes.

Here, then, were two villains in search of Kitty and me, with evil intentions towards us, and we were quite defenceless. Truly, a pleasant predicament to be in! What was I to do now?

Had I been able to reason out at leisure what course a person ought to pursue in such a situation, I feel sure that my answer to the above question would have been: Take care of your own safety, keep out of the men's clutches the best way you can, and do not bother yourself about any one else. But when the situation actually occurred, I acted on the impulse of the moment, because there was no time to think the matter over carefully, and take counsel with reason. And the consequence of being in such a hurry was, that I did not behave with that prudent regard to my own interests which was generally characteristic

of me. I was frightened I must candidly confess, and I desired ardently to be anywhere in security, and to avoid meeting either Napoleon or César. Yet, strange to say, I was influenced at that moment by something else than care for myself. My predominant anxiety—the one object on which my mind was fixed—was, to get to Kitty as quickly as possible, to warn her of the danger, to stand by her, to try to save her. It was certainly very unlike me to have felt like that, and I do not know what occasioned so extraordinary a departure from my usual sentiments. However, there the feeling was, and “*c’était plus fort que moi.*” Consequently, I only waited where I was till the men were far enough off for me to leave my hiding-place without danger of being discovered, and then instantly set out to rejoin her. Taking the utmost pains to move quietly, lest the shaking of the bushes should betray my presence, I crept through the *maquis*. Meanwhile I mentally reviewed the situation, and considered how we could extricate ourselves from it.

I inferred, from what the men had said, that they were not particularly brave, and would probably not venture to attack the carriage if they found its occupants prepared to receive them. Therefore, if we could get safely back to our

driver and put him on his guard, there would not be much to fear from the rascals. But then the question was, *could* we get back safely? could we, by crawling through bushes, dodging behind trees, and keeping out of sight as much as possible, retrace our steps to the carriage unperceived? On the whole, I thought it was to be managed—provided, of course, that I could reach Kitty and get her away before either of our enemies had found her. As they did not know that they were detected, they would expect to meet us going about carelessly and openly, without the least attempt at concealment. This was all in our favour, as it would prevent them from looking for us as closely as they would otherwise have done. Besides, if they did not find us in that immediate neighbourhood, they would discontinue the search, under the impression that we must have returned to the carriage almost directly after leaving it. Therefore it would be only necessary for us to keep in hiding till we had got some distance from where we then were; after that, we could leave the *maquis*, and take to the road, where we should be able to run along at full speed, without troubling to keep out of sight.

As I thought of all this, it seemed to me that we had a very reasonable prospect of escape—

unless, by bad luck, I should fail to get to Kitty before one of the men had found her—everything appeared to me to depend upon that.

I had left her on a small open space which jutted out a little from the hillside, so as to form a sort of diminutive plateau. Great was my relief, when I came to the edge of this place, to see her still sketching happily, and evidently without a suspicion of danger. She glanced towards me for an instant, and then at once resumed her work, thinking that I was come to fetch her away, and that she must make the most of every remaining moment. Thus her eyes were upon the drawing, and so she did not see the gesture which I made to her to be silent, lest an enemy should be within hearing.

“Is it time to go, already?” she said, speaking out loud, as it was natural she should do. “Isn’t your watch——”

By that time I was within reach of her, and stopped further utterance forcibly by covering her mouth with my hand. Looking up in surprise and wrath at so unceremonious a proceeding on the part of her maid, she saw by my face that there was something seriously amiss. I began to tell her in a whisper, as fast as I could, what was the state of affairs.

Unluckily the few words she had spoken had wrought the mischief I feared, and showed our whereabouts to one of the villains who were hunting for us. Consequently, I had hardly commenced my hurried communication in her ear, when a low whistle sounded close by, and next moment a man with a gun in his hand stepped out of the bushes, and on to the little plateau where we were. This, then, was no doubt the rogue named César, whom I had heard undertake to explore the *maquis* for us. As I looked at him, I recognised him to be one of the two men whom I had noticed inquiring about us two or three hours before, at the inn where the horses had been watered. That at once made the whole matter clear to me.

I have already mentioned that the nature of the ground was such as to enable a pedestrian to travel from point to point as fast as a carriage could do. Knowing this, César and his companion must have made up their minds to hurry on in front, and lie in wait for us at some spot which we had not yet reached, and which they deemed especially favourable for an attack on the carriage. But on their way to the place that they had chosen for an ambush, they had evidently caught sight of Kitty and me leaving the carriage, and been diverted from their first scheme by the hope of securing the

coveted booty in a less hazardous manner than the one they had originally contemplated. It was all as plain as a pike-staff to me now.

César accosted us in French, saying, in the regular beggar's whine, "Will the ladies have the goodness to give something to a poor man?"

Though I had not had time fully to explain things to Kitty, she had picked up enough to know that we were in danger from two escaped *penitenciers*, and when she saw César she guessed that he was one of them.

This sudden confronting with peril, however, produced in her no trepidation, sign of cowardice, or inclination to quail. She was too proud for that. Her compressed lips, flashing eyes, and hard, resolute, disdainful, undaunted expression, showed a nature that would set its back to the wall (not that there was one handy on the present occasion, however), and fight to the last gasp, but would never flinch an atom, come what might.

"I have nothing for you," she replied, speaking as haughtily as though we had been in no way in the man's power.

"But I feel sure that Madame deceives herself," insisted César, who apparently did not wish to proceed to extremities till the arrival of his comrade Napoleon; "if she will have the complaisance

to seek, she will without doubt discover money, a watch, rings, brooches, chains, or some such little thing that would keep a poor man from dying of hunger."

At this point in the conversation, it occurred to me that a good loud scream for help might be introduced with singular appropriateness; and I proceeded to put my idea into execution. César, however, was of a different opinion, and evidently considered the interruption an untimely one; for no sooner did I uplift my voice, than he aimed his gun at me, exclaiming savagely, "Silence at once, or I'll kill you!"

I had no option about obeying this order, because just at that moment, Napoleon—who was hastening up in obedience to his companion's summons—came through the bushes behind where I stood, and clapped his hand roughly over my mouth.

César grinned mockingly when he saw me thus reduced to silence, and lowered his gun again.

"That was an atrocious noise!" he remarked. "Permit me to inform you, madame—first, that screams cannot assist you, since there is no one but us within hearing; secondly, that my friend and myself have inconceivably tender hearts and sensitive nerves. Consequently we cannot endure

the least sound of distress ; and if you should utter another cry in our presence, we should be compelled, most reluctantly, to cut your throat in order to spare the exquisite sensibility of our natures. And having given you this caution, let us return to the more pleasing subject of the little *souvenirs* which you generous ladies are going to bestow upon us. Will you like us to save you trouble by helping ourselves to them?"

Kitty was as composed as though she had been seated in her father's drawing-room in Eaton Square, and now said to me in English :

"I'm afraid he's right about there being no one in hearing to help us, Jill, so it's no good screaming. As resistance is useless, we may as well give up our purses and trinkets quietly." Then she continued in French, replying to what the man had said last : "No—you need not help yourselves. We will hand over to you all we have."

Accordingly we pulled out our money, and took off the few things of any value we happened to be wearing—such as watches, chains, and collar and sleeve studs. These, however, were worth but little, all put together. People do not take valuable jewellery with them on a rough driving-tour ; and as Mrs. Rollin was our treasurer, Kitty and I had barely ten francs between us in our purses.

The two robbers, therefore, who had been reckoning confidently on making a large haul, were greatly dissatisfied and disappointed at the insignificance of the booty they had secured.

"This won't do *at all*," grumbled César; "the idea of capturing a couple of the rich English, and then not getting more than *this* out of them! It is ridiculous! Let us see what is to be done—only first they must be kept from running away."

And then, after making fast our hands and feet, they drew a few steps aside, and proceeded to confer together in a low voice.

Though they had spoken to us in French, yet in their communications to one another they used Italian. Noticing this, it occurred to me that if they were to suppose us both to be ignorant of that tongue, they would probably talk more freely before us than they would do if they thought we understood what was said; in this way we might, perhaps, pick up valuable information; or at least *I* might—for Kitty's knowledge of Italian was very limited. I at once imparted my idea to her, and suggested we should pretend that we understood only French. I expected she would assent to this as a matter of course; but, to my surprise, she hesitated, and her face showed that the proposition was distasteful to her.

“Well—I don’t know,” she replied, after a minute’s consideration, “I can’t allow a couple of scamps to make me degrade myself by telling a lie. If they ask me whether I understand them or not, I shall most certainly tell them the truth.”

I was dismayed at this clinging to principles of scrupulous honour in dealing with the two rogues who had us in their power. Her sentiments were very chivalrous and noble, no doubt; but they appeared to me both uncalled-for and out of place at the present moment, and I endeavoured to combat them. “Surely,” I said, “you don’t deny the truth of the old saying that all is fair in love and war?”

Her lip curled scornfully as she replied, “That has nothing to do with it. To my mind a lie would be none the less *mean* because it might be *fair*. I should lose my self-respect if I were to tell one.”

Even whilst smarting at the reproof which was thus conveyed to me for having advocated lying, I could not help admiring the indomitable pride which was unaffected by considerations of expediency, and would under no circumstances consent to do what was contrary to its sense of dignity. The hankering after her good opinion which I always felt made me wonder uneasily what she

would think of me if she knew how many untruths *my* self-respect had managed to put up with during my existence. And then I felt half-disgusted with my past conduct, and it flashed upon me that I had a great mind to turn over a new leaf in the matter in future, and behave more according to the principles which she approved of and practised. That, however, should be reserved for further consideration, as the present was obviously not a favourable occasion for inaugurating any reform of the kind. Having arrived at which conclusion, I silently resolved to carry out my plan for deceiving our captors, if possible, in spite of her objection. Consequently, when one of them, speaking in Italian, asked which of us two ladies was the most important one, I affected to be utterly unconscious of having been addressed. Kitty, fortunately, was seated farther off from the man than I was, and did not hear what he said, or discover that he was not still continuing the conversation with his comrade.

The man repeated his question a second time in Italian. Finding that we both remained mute, he asked in French how long it would be before he had an answer. I hastened to reply to this, speaking quickly and in a low tone, lest Kitty should hear what I said, and be prompted by her

inconveniently high-flown sentiments to contradict me flatly. I made believe to be quite astonished to find he had been speaking to us, and most anxious to deprecate his wrath—assuring him that we neither of us understood Italian, and begging him to excuse us, therefore, for the involuntary rudeness of which we had been guilty in not responding to his question. Luckily my precaution of speaking indistinctly, and the fact of Kitty's being a few yards off, prevented her from catching what passed between me and my interlocutor. The two men then came and stood in front of us, and Napoleon said in French, "We want to know which of you two ladies is of the most importance—the chief one?"

"I am," answered Kitty.

"Good," he returned; "then it is to you that I will speak. We know that you cannot be travelling about with no more money than 10 francs, and that you English are always rolling in gold. It follows, therefore, that your riches must be in the keeping of that other lady who stayed with the carriage. Now, those riches we must and will have, and we propose that you shall earn your liberty by helping us to get them. Will you do this?"

"Tell me what you want me to do, first," answered

Kitty; "then I will tell you whether I will do it or not."

"Very reasonable!" replied Napoleon. "Our plan is this. You must write to your friend in the carriage such a note as will induce her to follow the bearer at once, in order to join you. The note will be entirely in French, and contain not a word of English, so as to make sure that you say nothing in it that we do not approve of. One of us will take it to her; then he will conduct her to a safe spot, and relieve her of the money and trinkets that she has. Should the worth of these be sufficient to satisfy our just expectations, you will none of you be detained any longer."

"And supposing the spoil is less than you anticipate," inquired Kitty, "what then?"

"Ah—but that cannot be, I feel sure!" he returned; "our expectations are most moderate; it cannot be that three ladies would travel about so far from their own country without having with them as much money as would satisfy us!"

"Still—I repeat my question," she said; "what would you do if *not*? And, in any case, what certainty have I that you would keep your word and release us afterwards?"

"If madame will not rely on our word of honour," answered he, smiling disagreeably, "I

fear she will have to content herself without that certainty which she desires. *She* is hardly in the position to enforce any other guarantee of good faith ; and *we* shall not insult ourselves by assuming such a thing to be necessary. And as for the quite unlikely event of your friend's purse being insufficient to meet our wants—why—ahem! when the case arises, it will be then ample time to settle what is to be done. Here are paper and a pencil. There is no time to lose. Will madame be so good as to write?"

Kitty looked at him steadily, without attempting to take the writing materials he proffered. "And do you suppose, then," she said, "that I shall consent to bait a trap to bring my aunt to be robbed? If so, you are very greatly mistaken. And what inducement have you to offer that should make me do so vile a thing? The mere chance that your thirst for plunder might then be satiated, and that you might think fit to set us free! I do not trust to your honour, nor will I do what you wish. I believe that the plan is merely a *ruse* to enable you to secure a fresh victim, and that if you could get my aunt also into your hands, you would keep us all three prisoners."

This accusation was met with vehement denials ; and our captors again endeavoured to persuade her

to assist them by assuring her it would be to her advantage to do so, and threatening her with evil consequences if she persisted in her refusal. Finding, however, that she remained unmoved by whatever they said, they bethought them that perhaps *I* might be made to write such a letter as they required, and applied to me accordingly. Kitty, on this, gave me peremptory orders that I was on no account to comply with their request; and I obeyed her in the matter all the more willingly because I had very little doubt that her surmise was correct as to the treachery which the scoundrels had in contemplation.

But however much Mrs. Rollin might benefit from our refusal to lend ourselves to their designs, it certainly did not help *us* in any way. The two men had made up their minds that they were going to get enormous spoils out of "these rich English," and had no idea of resigning their hopes merely because Kitty and I would not aid them to execute their first scheme. Therefore, when they saw they had no chance of carrying their point about that, they determined to adopt another line of action, which was announced to us by César.

People so unaccommodating and perverse as we were, he said angrily, deserved to be got rid

of altogether ; and in such a case as this, most gentlemen of the road would not be troubled with us any longer, but cut our throats without ceremony, and so make an end of the business at once. He and his friend, however, being of so gentle a disposition as never to resort to violence *if it could be helped*, would give us a chance of escape. It was their intention to communicate with our friends, and offer to restore us uninjured on payment of a specified sum, which would have to be handed over with such precautions as would ensure the safety of the recipients. Till that was received we should reside under their care in the hills. "But," added the ruffian menacingly, and addressing himself especially to Kitty, "we cannot wait for ever for the answer, you know ; so we shall tell your friends that if the ransom is not forthcoming pretty quickly, we shall try to hasten its arrival by sending some little reminder, such as an ear, a nose, a hand, or a foot ; and of course these *souvenirs* would, in the first place, be furnished by you, since you are of more consequence than your companion. Hers would come later."

When I heard this I could not repress a shudder at the peril awaiting my cherished members—though, as those of Kitty were destined to be sacrificed first, the danger to mine was only a

reversionary one. She, however, who was more immediately threatened than I was, neither trembled, changed colour, nor gave any other indication of emotion, but remained as unmoved and haughtily composed as before.

I did not forget that she had been affected by some feeling too strong to be concealed when I had suddenly showed her the photograph of Captain Norroy. And the difference between her demeanour then and now made me wonder more than ever what the feeling could have been which had had power to upset the self-command of a person so high-couraged, strong, and proudly imperturbable as she most certainly was.

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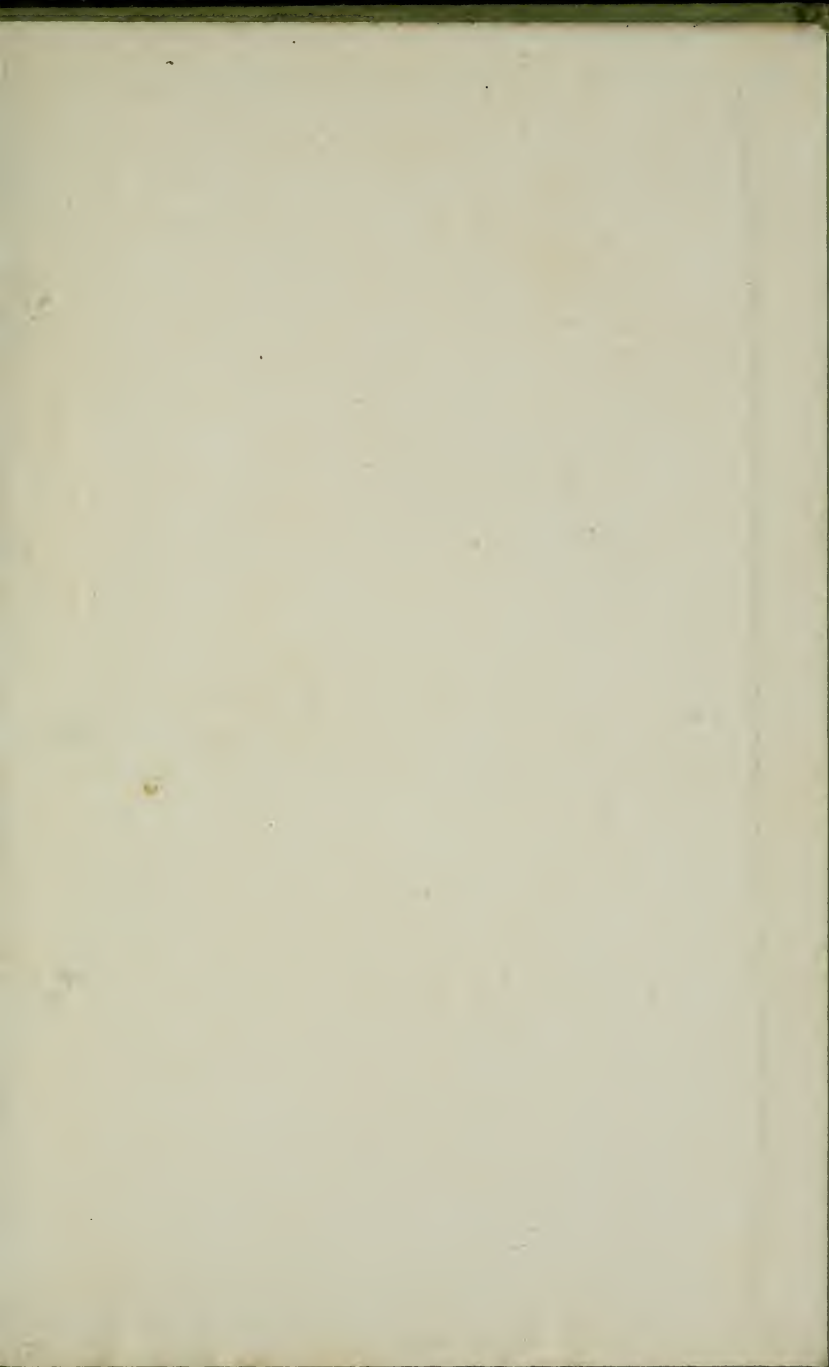
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